

The Pringler Call Center



“Your call is important to us. Please stay on the line and the next available operator will be with you shortly,” cooed Earl into the telephone. He placed the receiver into a cradle next to a speaker and switched on the record player. A scratchy recording of The Poltergeist Polka played by Frank Heebers and his Orchestra blared from the speaker. He rubbed his thumb against the turntable so that the record slowed, then sped up. Sometimes the caller would find the effect so annoying that he’d hang up. And that’s just what Earl wanted. Since *he* was the next – and only – available operator and since *he* hadn’t had a nicotine fix in two hours, he’d darn well take time out for a smoke before getting back to that customer. Earl was owner/operator of the Pringler Call Center, a centralized office that handled customer service, debt collection and telemarketing for more than a hundred different companies in the Pacific Northwest. And while most modern call centers employed sophisticated computer telephony integration to increase efficiency, Earl relied on a single-line rotary telephone, a record player and an assortment of sound effect devices. He’d gotten so good at irking his callers that he typically wound up talking to only one of every fifteen of them. And that number plummeted to one in forty when he employed his nearly unintelligible faux Bangalore accent. He reached for his coffee cup, discovered it empty, and dropped it on the floor, where it clattered onto the pile of other empty cups. He turned down the record player’s volume and leaned close to the telephone. “All of our operatorsh are ba-ba-busy assshisting other cushtomersh,” he said in a perfect Mel Blanc-does-Daffy Duck voice. “Pleash shtay on the line for the na-na-next available operator.” Pressing his ear to the receiver, Earl heard that most welcome of sounds: a dial tone. **Yes!** Cheerfully, he hung up the phone. He was on a roll now; that was the tenth in a row! Could he break his record of twenty-five? The phone rang again. He picked it up, held a handkerchief over the receiver to muffle his voice, and began the spiel anew. “Your call is important to us.” Baloney, he thought! A cigarette – *that* was important! “Please stay on the line-ine-ine-ine,” he said, modulating his voice like a de-tuned banjo. Down went the phone; up came The Poltergeist Polka. A minute later, another dial tone. **Yes!**