

## **THANKS FOR YOUR TIME**

By George J. Condon

Peter Boxleiter's personal computer chirped to tell him that it was two o'clock in the afternoon and he was scheduled to interview a job applicant. Boxleiter always took time out from his busy schedule as CEO of Chemistar to meet any prospective employees. Even after being screened by Human Resources and by several layers of middle management, nobody got hired at Chemistar Industries without meeting "The Skipper", as Boxleiter liked to be called.

Boxleiter's subordinates thought that The Skipper just wanted to stay in touch with his staff, but he had another motive. By seeing every applicant personally, Boxleiter made sure that he weeded out any liberals, feminists or gays who were trying to infiltrate his corporation. He found it bad enough having to employ a few token blacks to keep up appearances.

Boxleiter's desk phone rang and he pressed the speaker switch.

"Yes?"

"Sir, there's a Mr. Stanton here to see you," Sally Shatner said in her sultry voice.

"Give me five minutes, then send him in," Boxleiter said.

After he switched the phone speaker off, Boxleiter thought about Sally's pretty face, large breasts and shapely behind. He hadn't added his secretary to his list of sexual conquests yet, but she was definitely on the agenda. Boxleiter looked like Hollywood's notion of a corporate executive, tall and handsome with his dark hair graying at the temples. He rarely had trouble getting what he wanted from women.

Pulling his mind back to business, Boxleiter searched the top of his desk until he found the file folder that Sally had left for him. He skimmed through the pages quickly. Richard Stanton. Age thirty-eight. Advanced chemistry degree from one of the better universities. Ten years experience in plastics. Stanton's photo showed he was a white male who wore his dark hair in a conservative cut. So far, the fellow looked like a good candidate, but one could never be sure.

Many job applicants seemed promising, until they hung themselves by expressing some liberal opinion or other. Boxleiter was good at smoking out subversives without having them suspect a thing.

He heard a knock at the door, then Stanton walked in. The man looked like a cartoonist's idea of a geek, with his rumpled blue suit that seemed a couple of sizes too large. Boxleiter wore carefully tailored Armani suits and hated sloppy dressers. Still, whoever got this job would be wearing a smock anyway, inside one of Chemistar's labs. No, clothing was not the issue here. It was attitude that counted.

"Have a seat," Boxleiter said, waving at a chair he'd placed in front of his desk.

"Thank you, Sir," Stanton said as he sat down.

Boxleiter flashed his killer smile.

"We'll have to keep this brief, Stanton. I've got a meeting in the board room within half an hour."

"I understand, Sir. Thanks for your time. You don't know how much it means to me, meeting you in person."

So, the fellow is a real butt kisser, Boxleiter thought. Well, that wasn't necessarily a problem. He liked having his ego stroked.

"I understand you've spent ten years with Durox Chemicals," Boxleiter said. "Why do you want to leave them?"

"Durox is a great company. I just don't feel I'd have the same opportunity there that I'd have with Chemistar."

Stanton sounded ambitious. Boxleiter liked that. The ambitious ones worked long hours cheerfully, hoping their extra efforts would ease their climb up the promotional ladder. Usually, it didn't, but employee gullibility could be useful.

Boxleiter despised text book interview tactics, such as asking

an applicant where he saw himself being five years from now or what were his weaknesses. The clever ones learned quickly how to fake the right answers to those tired old questions. He had a question of his own that usually got the liberals to betray themselves. It seemed an innocuous thing to ask, but it threw people off balance and Boxleiter found it remarkable what their answers revealed.

"What do you think of corporations, Stanton?" he asked.

"They don't really exist," Stanton said.

"What?" Boxleiter said, startled by the response.

"Corporations are just legal fictions, set up to protect their shareholders against creditors," Stanton said. "It's really the senior executives who make things happen, for better or for worse. For example, everyone knows that the driving force behind Chemistar Industries is really you."

"Well, yes," Boxleiter said, feeling flattered.

"You're even more of a 'hands on' executive than most," Stanton said. "For example, I know you interview all of the company's job applicants personally. My wife told me that."

"Your wife works here?"

"Not any more. Linda worked in your solvents plant for eight years. She used her own family name, Osler."

The mention of Linda Osler's name brought a flood of memories back to Boxleiter, none of them pleasant. How long had it been since the company's lawyers defended Chemistar against her lawsuit? Ah, yes. Six months.

"So, you're Osler's husband," Boxleiter said. "You must know then that Chemistar was found to be blameless in her illness."

"I don't blame Chemistar," Stanton said.

"You don't? Well, good."

"No. As I said, Mr. Boxleiter, the company is a fiction. You made the policies that forced Linda and her coworkers to use those toxic chemicals without proper ventilation. You hired those stooge inspectors who kept telling them that the vapor levels in the lab were within safe limits. I blame you, not the company."

Boxleiter felt a chill run down his spine. He moved his left hand slowly toward his desk telephone, wanting to call security but afraid of what Stanton might do if he got caught trying to do it.

"If your wife was unhappy with her work environment, she could have quit her job," Boxleiter said.

"We had huge student loans to pay off, so Linda stayed here. She kept writing memos to her management, asking for ventilators or protective equipment. Of course, buying stuff like that would have cost money and might have decreased shareholder profits, so her requests were ignored. Then, one day, Linda's doctor told her she had cancer."

Boxleiter's hand was almost touching the phone now.

"How is your wife feeling these days?" he asked.

"She's not feeling anything, Mr. Boxleiter. She died a week ago. Of course, you wouldn't know that. You weren't there when the chemotherapy made her hair fall out or when the radiation treatments burned her skin and made her vomit. You didn't hold her all night while she moaned in pain, despite the morphine. You didn't see the way she died."

Boxleiter made a grab for the phone, but Stanton got to it first, yanked it off the desk, then threw it across the room.

"Now, we won't be interrupted," Stanton said. "I went to a lot of trouble to meet you face to face, Boxleiter. I knew that posing as a job applicant was the only way to get past your guards."

Boxleiter was sweating now.

"Be reasonable, Stanton. You can't possibly blame me for your wife's death."

"Of course I can," Stanton said calmly. He reached into the pocket of his suit jacket and pulled out something with his right hand. For one horrible moment, Boxleiter thought the man had a gun. He felt dizzy with relief when he saw that Stanton was holding only a small device that resembled a television remote control unit.

"It's this red button," Stanton said, pointing to the unit with his left hand.

What was the maniac babbling about? Boxleiter shrank back into his chair as Stanton stood up and walked around the desk to confront

him.

"I lied on my job application," Stanton said. "I wasn't in the plastics division at Durox. My job was in another department. We made materials for the military. I think you can guess what kind of materials. If not, this will give you a hint."

Stanton used his left hand to unbutton his baggy suit jacket and hold it open. Boxleiter whimpered in terror when he saw what was strapped around Stanton's torso under the jacket.

"You see, when Linda died, I died too," Stanton said.

"I can give you money, Stanton. Lots of money. Anything you want. Just don't do this."

Stanton leaned in close, so that he was standing right over the cowering Boxleiter.

"I don't need money anymore, Boxleiter. When I thought about all those years of life you took away from Linda, I realized there was only one thing I could take from you that would compensate."

"For God's sake, Stanton! Don't!"

"Thanks for your time, Mr. Boxleiter" Stanton said, then he pressed the red button.

The blast rattled windows as far away as two city blocks.

The End