

The Man with the Metal File and the Toilet Roll Holder

Shôn Ellerton, May 26, 2022

I found it odd that one of my colleagues on occasion would walk around the office with a metal file. Now I know why...



Many of us come across odd things from time to time. In my case, recently, one of my colleagues was pacing up and down the office with, what looked to be like a knife in his hand, but on closer inspection, it turned out to be a thin metal file.

I paid scant regard at the time; however, I caught him out a few other times during the year pacing back and forth in front of me, file poised in hand, along with a strong expression of intent on his face. Almost stoic.

Curiosity aroused, I asked him why he deemed it necessary to carry around a metal file in an office. What was he going to do with it? File bits of metal out of boredom? Pick foodstuffs out of his teeth? Did he have a spat with someone in the office and thought that a modicum of intimidation might put things right?

His answer made me laugh out loud, so let me explain.

I'm sure many of us have come across little contraptions to make life a little more awkward from time to time. Some of these contraptions have good intentions behind them, but often, they turn out to be a little irksome.

The contraption which irritated my colleague, and probably many others including me, is the little metal stub attached to the toilet roll holder to ensure that the *maximum* length allowed for each piece of toilet paper torn off is the equivalent of one revolution. This is, say, no more than about four inches?

Possibly six or more if you lucky when the toilet roll ‘illegally’ slips around the core without breaking a tear in the paper.

Well. There are ways to work around this. The cleaners always leave a spare wrapped toilet roll on top of the toilet. Most of us simply unwrap the new one and, after use, it just sits back on top of the toilet. The one installed on the toilet roll with the little stub governing the maximum length allowed for each sheet remains unused. However, my esteemed colleague had recourse for a more rigorous solution.

Instead of unwrapping the new roll, he files off the little metal governor stub. It only just dawned on me why, on some occasions, the toilet holder allowed me to draw a more sensible length in which to conduct my business with. The little metal governor stub had, indeed, been filed off! My colleague suddenly became my hero.

However, I can sense that a myriad of discussions was taking place in the back corridors of the cleaning department, on the discovery that toilet roll holders are being vandalised. Why? Because every time my esteemed colleague files off the governing stub, a new toilet roll holder is installed. Common sense would suggest that it would be easier just to let it be. However, that is becoming a rare commodity these days. The toilet roll holder is replaced with a new one, and I have little doubt that the old one gets thrown away. This had occurred at least five times during the last two years.

Writing this reminded me of the ‘dragon ladies’ in Germany. Usually large and overbearing and dressed all in white, they would ‘guard’ the conveniences with the typical might of a Teutonic leader. Yes, they will barge into the men’s toilets without scruple or diffidence, barking orders if one’s use of toilet paper is deemed excessive. I had this thought of proposing and patenting a new toilet holder fitted with a little bell that rings on each revolution. I could have made a killing with this in Germany!

As for my colleague, will there be a manhunt declared by a sort of secret cleaners’ version of a star chamber? Will my hero colleague be found out and interrogated via means of a toilet ducking stool for being accused as a toilet roll holder destructor? The mind boggles!