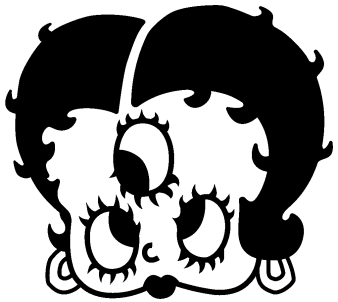
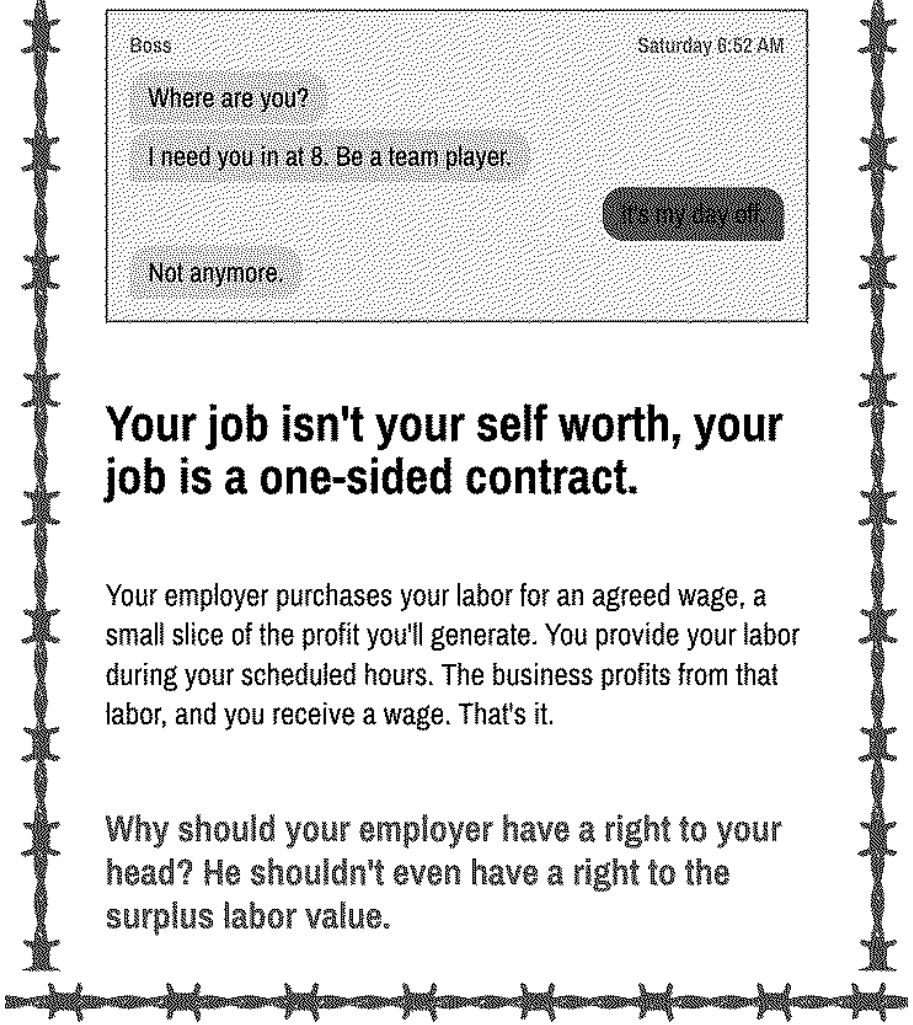


HOUDINI Magazine

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Your job isn't your self worth, your job is a one-sided contract.

Your employer purchases your labor for an agreed wage, a small slice of the profit you'll generate. You provide your labor during your scheduled hours. The business profits from that labor, and you receive a wage. That's it.

Why should your employer have a right to your head? He shouldn't even have a right to the surplus labor value.

PROLE VENT

HOUDINI

Your job isn't your self worth, your job is a one-sided contract.

because of this hierarchy of bullshit, your business suffers. And honestly, that’s your problem and not mine.

have your pay docked and potentially be retaliated against.

So why would I sit here and think that I'm incompetent, that I'm a rube, that I'm, you know, incapable, that I'm, you know, whatever it is that the boss man is saying, when it's clearly the other way around?

Ideally you want to create a workplace environment that encourages your employees to propose solutions, because I could never propose any of these solutions to my boss. That's the thing. If I were to go at him and say, "Look, here's a list of all the things I've thought of and learned since I've started working here that we should, we could optimize and improve to make you more money. It's literally going to make you more money. I'm thinking about this on my own time and of my own volition." You know what's gonna happen? I'm gonna get hemmed the fuck up because he's gonna see it not as that but as somebody overstepping the boundaries and calling him wrong and saying he doesn't know how to operate a business, when in reality I'm just here every day on shift and I notice things that you don't because you're not, because you're the owner. But because we can't have these discussions as adults

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PROLE VENT minimum wage jobs and minimum effort managers

Erik Houdini · November 7, 2026

Some of you guys might remember last week, I was talking about wage theft because I had some wages taken out of my check when my boss felt appropriate to recuperate losses due to a customer requesting a refund and me miscommunicating some information about our refund policy to that customer. I was written up and had about a hundred dollars taken out of my paycheck, which was a significant setback because I make minimum wage, make fifteen dollars an hour. I had to sign a document that explicitly acknowledged that our refund policy is one sentence, all refund requests will be deferred to the owner, my boss.

Last night on shift, woman arrives at about 1:30 in the morning. She's paid for two nights. She has her toddler with her. And she's quite distressed. Why is she distressed? Because she spent the last of her money on a room for two nights thinking that she

software suite to send a single text message just reminding guests that there is a security deposit for incidentals. Then no one will arrive confused because everyone got the text message. Then you don’t have guests who arrive angry and demand refunds, and overall your business ends up improving because you’re creating better optimization. You’re proactively reducing customer friction and smoothing operations, and then as these procedures get ironed out, they become standard, so employees don’t make the same mistake.

Because here’s what’s going to happen: the same exact situation could occur, where a customer is angry, upset, and wants a refund. The person who’s going to replace me, because I’m surely going to be fired at this rate now that my hours have been cut to skeleton hours, and at that point I’m going to need to find a new job because I can’t pay rent on those hours, is not going to know what to do. Nothing was ever written down and no procedures were ever created, and the refund policy remains “defer everything to the manager,” with the unspoken rule that if you defer it in the wrong way or at the wrong time or say the wrong thing about a refund, you will

Booking. So customers are confused.

Last week, the reason a customer was upset about a refund and the reason I ended up having my pay docked to cover this refund was because they were upset about the $100 security deposit. They arrived at the location and did not have the $100 security deposit. I offered to hold their ID, which is our procedure. They did not like this, and didn't want their ID held at the desk, and so they canceled their reservation and asked if they would get a refund, and I said, "I don't see why you wouldn't get a refund because you're no longer staying with us. Your reservation has been canceled." That got me money taken right out of my check.

Well, if the same incident report procedure was done, which is standard in any sort of actual professional environment, we would have sat down and discussed potential resolutions that would have proactively solved the problem. Those could include, one, actually discussing what the fucking review, cancellation, and refund policy is, and two, setting up a system so that customers are informed in advance explicitly about the $100 deposit. That could be as simple as using the automated text messaging system that already comes standard with our hotel

had booked for Friday and Saturday night. But due to either something in our admin settings or the way Expedia works or something along those lines, when you book past midnight online, it books you for the next day automatically and there's no warning about this. She explained to me, not very calmly if I'm being honest, that the money that she had just paid for the room was the last money in her bank and that she was hoping to get a refund because she had just paid about thirty minutes prior online. I told her plainly that I cannot tell her if she will or won't get a refund. I can't tell her anything about the refund. And I handed her the business card for my manager, the owner of the building, my boss. She was quite upset about this because she wanted an answer about what our refund policy was, and I told her that our refund policy is that she has to reach out to my manager in the morning. She wouldn't take no for an answer. And after about ten minutes of yelling at me, I gave her my boss's phone number. How did I locate this number on the side panel next to the computer? There is a list of numbers from the boss's name to all the housekeeping managers to the tech support, all the useful numbers you might want on your shift. The problem is, is that the business card that has my boss's name on it just routes back to the

hotel front desk. His number isn't on that card. So she called the number right in front of me. It rang once and then she hung up and said, Oh. And became even more irate. Keep in mind this woman had just paid about three hundred dollars to stay at our hotel. So, I give her, my boss's number from the list, assuming that this is probably his business number that when she calls this number, it'll go to her voicemail. She'll get so-and-so, owner of so-and-so building. And she'll leave her message and the crisis will be resolved to the best of my ability.

Either way, I can't answer her question about a refund. The only thing I can tell her is that the manager is the only one who can decide anything in relation to a refund and to contact the manager. So she calls my boss. It turns out that it's his personal cell phone number and he answered and tried to help her out. But we had no more rooms available and she was ultimately very rude and she left. This was overall about a 25 minute incident.

I was told that the thing I should have done instead of calling the manager was to call the police and have her removed from the property, despite the fact that she had just paid two hundred and fifty dollars

management. So then the next time a customer comes in and this happens, they could call the Google Voice number, get a pre-recorded voicemail that goes over their options and what's going to happen, and the front desk attendant can say, "Call this number. This is the number to management," and everything goes smoothly.

But none of this can happen if you are running an operation that is run off of fear and really just honestly incompetent management. It's poor management.

For example, this hotel has a $100 security deposit, and every shift that I have worked, at least one person complains or does not have the money for this security deposit, and then I have to hold their ID at the front desk, which doesn't really make any sense because someone needs their ID. They come back to the front desk, "Hey, I'm driving, can I get my ID?" Sure. Well, then why are we holding your ID at the front desk in the first place in lieu of your deposit? Either you can get the deposit or you can't. Maybe we can do a $50 deposit, but whatever.

The problem is that this is poorly communicated. The deposit is listed in the fine print on Expedia and

So the solution to this wouldn't be to retaliate against your employee who attempted to follow the limited procedures that were put into place. Instead, you would go, "Okay, we should probably have a number that people can call at any hour to get a voicemail or similar in relation to refunds. We could put that number on the card and have it say 'Refund information, call here.' That number could be a Google Voice number. It could be very cheap to manage. You wouldn't even have to respond to it. You could just read the voicemails in text. Very elegant solution."

The other issue, and this was my mistake, was that the number was given out. The number on the board was with other numbers such as Spectrum help desk and tech support. So I'm assuming that the numbers on this list are business numbers. Well, it turns out that the number listed for the owner is his personal number. So perhaps we would, one, go over which numbers are business numbers and which aren't, and two, reiterate that the person shouldn't be giving out that phone number. That would also be solved by instituting the Google Voice number.

Again, none of these things require retaliation. None of these things require punishment-oriented

to the property. The only issue is that her reservation dates were wrong due to our system.

I went into work to fill in for a coworker working half of her shift at my second job, which is at his second location. And as I'm getting debriefed, tired as hell because I'm effectively working a double and a half, I get the text message and the group chat. My boss is irate. He's very mad. He talks about how I'm unreliable, how I can't handle any situations, how I am not suited to work at the front desk. My hours are cut, my schedule has been shifted, and now I get less hours but have only one day off a week instead of two. There was never any contact made, it was never asked about this situation or the procedures or anything. And as far as I know, the only thing I can do with someone who wants a refund is to direct them to the manager. Honestly, when you explain it like this, I don't sound that unreasonable. And I have been sitting on shift for the last about four hours mulling over why I am so incompetent and cannot seem to, as my mother would say, "get it together".

I mean, after all, it's a minimum wage job. If you can't handle a minimum wage job, I mean, what can you handle? There's a certain level of self-worth tied to my work ethic. Every day when I go to work for

this job, I have to walk either both ways or at the very least one way. Occasionally I do take an Uber to work. Because walking four miles when you get off of a shift is a nightmare. Doing it both ways is even worse. But Ubers are expensive and I'm trying to budget hard, so it's a special treat to not walk. I had a bike but I gave it to one of the cleaning ladies she also lives in this hotel and works at the other location, she's in her late 50s early 60s and shouldn't be walking 4 miles both ways, I couldn't allow that. So here I am filling in for a coworker while being told that I'm unreliable. It all just seems a little bit too much.

So here's what I would have done if I were the manager, because I've been a team lead for things far more important than a hotel.

One, incident review: what happened, why did it happen, a full sit-down, a total discussion. Things should be documented. If this issue occurred, it'll probably occur again. How can we proactively stop it from occurring again? That means sitting down with the person who created the incident, figuring out what happened, and reviewing procedures. What were the procedures that happened? How did they get used? What was lacking in that regard, and what

procedures could be implemented to prevent this from happening in the future?

Okay. Well, first procedure: there is no actual number to call for the refund policy. The refund policy is literally that all refunds are deferred to management. If you give information about a refund, you can be written up and have your wages taken. So you can't give any information about a refund; you have to defer it to management.

Okay. Management is the owner. Skeleton crew team, no manager, owner handles everything. Great. There's a card on the front desk that has the manager's information on it, but the number calls the hotel front desk. So in this scenario, we have a customer who is angry that they can't get a refund, and the front desk attendant is in a predicament where they give this card to the person and say, "Here's the card to management. You can call them and request a refund. I can't give you any further information." Okay, they call the number and it rings the phone that's right in front of the front desk attendant, and now the customer is that much more upset.