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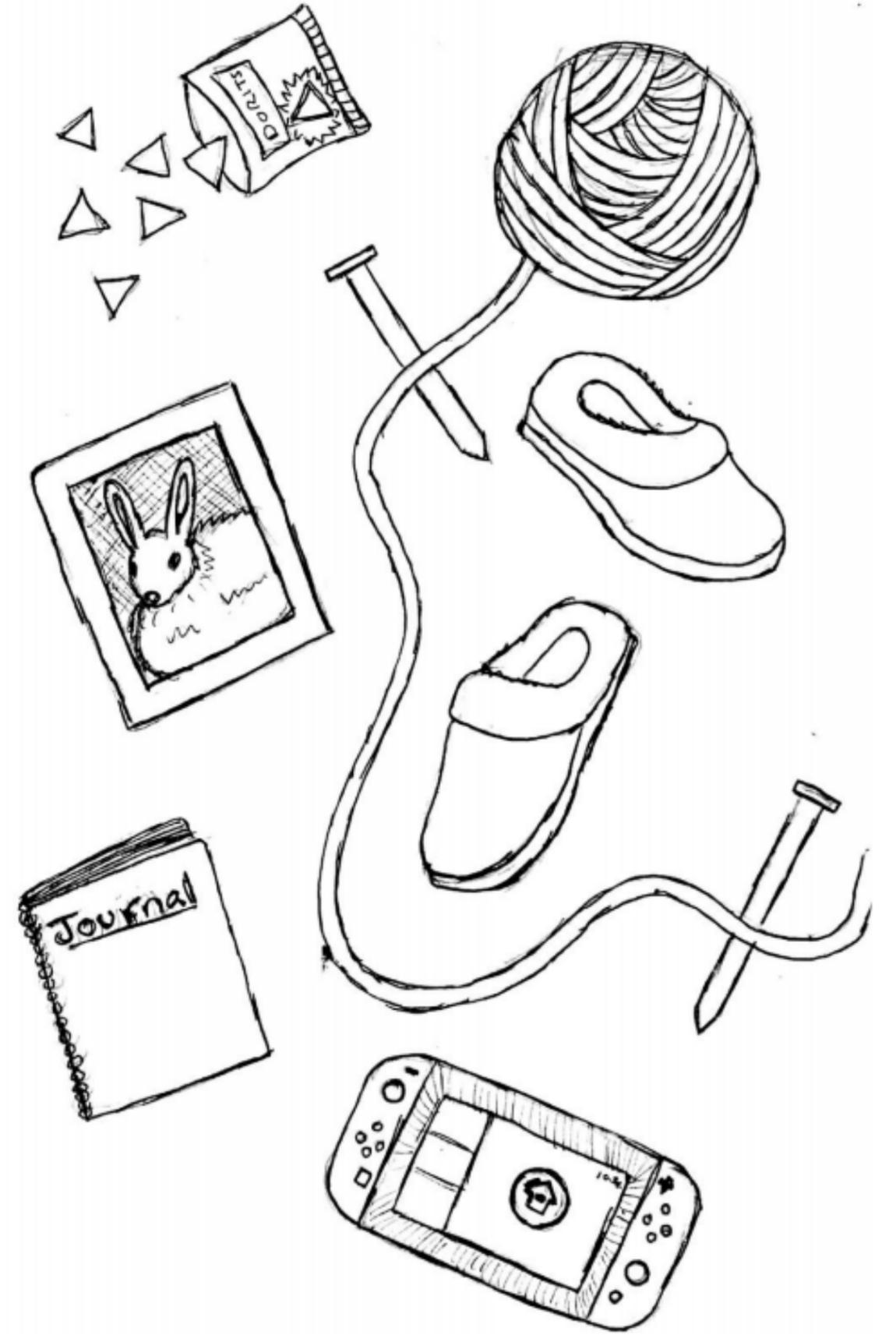
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*CapTel
Disconnect*

Produced by the CapTel Workers Union



The CapTel Survival Guide

Here are some things to consider bringing to the call floor.

Reading material. A novel, a comic, or this zine! Something quick and not too heavy works best for frequent interruptions.

Other activities. This could be anything from a craft project to a handheld gaming device. And the nintendo switch is call floor approved! Puzzles, coloring sheets, and notebooks are great. Write a journal or knit a sweater, and mix it up.

Moisturizer. We're heading into the winter months!
Cushioning. For your head. The headsets can feel brutal after a while.

A snack. And a reusable water bottle, CapTel branded or not. On days where you don't have the time or energy to pack a full lunch, bringing a small snack that you like is still a great option.

Dress in layers. The call floor's temperature is unpredictable! And while we're talking clothes: remember you have options as a CA. If you've never worn sweatpants on the call floor, I recommend having a comfy day at least once! It's nice.

A stuffed animal... or a picture of your pet, or something else to brighten up your cubicle. It makes a big difference when you break up the gray.

Lastly, a union membership card! Together, let's make CapTel better for all of us. In the meantime, rock your pajamas and take care of yourself.

Who We Are

We are every color, every size, every age, every gender. We are overworked and underpaid, overlooked and under pressure. We are disrespected. We are the backbone of CapTel and we deserve to be heard.

5-Point Platform

1

A Living Wage

This means a minimum of \$15/hr for CAs. CapTel Inc currently makes \$1.82/minute of captioned calls. CAs make \$0.18/minute for captioning. That is less than 10% of the capital we create for this company coming back to us. We demand that our wages be immediately increased to at least \$15/hr. This would increase our income to \$0.25/min. \$15/hr is only the first step on the road to more equal wage distribution, but it helps ensure that workers can afford medical bills, family expenses, tuition/debt, and living expenses.

2

Ninety Percent Adherence

We demand that CapTel reduce our monthly adherence compliance threshold from 95% to 90%. From needing to use the bathroom frequently to having to step out due to triggering call content, there are many reasons for reducing the adherence limit. In addition there are times in which we are doing work necessary to our jobs at CapTel that are considered out of adherence. Our adherence time is already stretched as is. We believe that 90% per day is a fair ask that will minimize the harm of the times when CapTel requires that we be out of adherence while doing our jobs, and give us a little extra time to care for our physical and mental health.

3 Better Equipment and Maintenance

CapTel needs an immediate equipment makeover. Old and failing CRT monitors give workers headaches and often display incorrectly, many of our keyboards have important keys missing, most of our chairs are broken in some way, and breakdowns in the kitchen or at the water fountains go unattended for weeks if not months. We demand updates to our monitors and desks. In addition, we ask that CapTel hire additional maintenance personnel to insure that the equipment we already have is well cared for and swiftly repaired.

4 Transportation Compensation

CAs need to be reimbursed for transportation expenses. Since the Milwaukee location doesn't have a designated parking lot (like the Madison location, for instance), CAs are expected to pay for parking. In addition the rising cost of public transportation takes a significant bite out of our paychecks. We demand that CapTel take on some of the cost of our commute. We want at least \$10 a week to be added to our income specifically for the purposes of subsidizing our transportation. Until CapTel can provide free parking and waivers for bus transport they should be at least partially responsible for our travel expenses.

5 Union Liasons

We demand that CapTel recognize the voice of CAs on an institutional level. To do this we ask that CapTel accept the appointment of at least one (likely more) person compensated by the union with direct access to admin meetings and information as well as the ability to serve as a mediator between workers and HR/admin. Workers deserve to have more concrete information about how the company is run and deserve the chance to voice concerns or make suggestions.



At one point in *STBY!* Cash begins to wonder “am I doing anything meaningful with my life?” He’s stuck in a rut of spending nine hours a day watching a computer screen and that’s a feeling we can all relate to. We have all watched minutes and hours of our lives tick away at work, wishing the time would go by faster, wishing away slices of our limited time here on earth. Cash eventually finds meaning in the fight to make his workplace better for himself and his coworkers. We can find that meaning for ourselves as well.

The Boss Is Not Your Friend, an Inside Joke

All day, every day, spending the spirit, watching the clock. Meaningless muttering goes in and comes out, processed, sanitized, for computer and client consumption. Chewing, digesting, regurgitating, starving to death, cloistered in cubes, individuals deprived, malnourished, starving to reclaim a tidbit of identity, a pause between calls, crossing their legs until break, if they can make it that long, hoping to find a friend in the breakroom, bathroom, hallway, elevator, smoking section, wherever, whoever, it doesn’t matter anymore, they’ve all but forgotten themselves.

Then the person obligated by their position, the power they assume, the first person all the prolies meet on their very first day walks past, smiles, nods, says ‘hi’ and mispronounces their name.

More important things to worry about, they tell themselves, hundreds of captionists to keep track of, perfectly forgivable, but then the floor operations supervisor does the same thing, and a recruiter follows their lead.

This is the Corporate Ego in action.

You see, everyone else knows who I am, stops to chat, shares details of their personal lives, asks for advice, gives me a greeting, a nod, save for a few who openly dislike me. And nobody else, regardless of their feelings, calls me by the wrong title.

Only the boss does that.

A Trauma Floor

The Verge recently published an article called “the Trauma Floor” about the hidden lives of Facebook’s content moderators, the folks who are responsible for reviewing the posts that Facebook users report to determine if they violate the site’s policies.

The article is an exposé of the austere working conditions at Cognizant, a third-party company that Facebook contracts with, and the brutal toll that the job takes on the content moderators’

**pain · loss
separation · big-
otry · illness
hate · slurs · de-
cay · mortality
surgery · anger
divorce · incar-
ceration · death
financial stress
heartbreak**

mental health and happiness. I was filled with horror while reading it by the oppressive and traumatic nature of the job until it dawned on me—Cognizant sounds exactly like CapTel.

Cognizant employees are forced to look at traumatic content all day long with no consideration for their mental well-being. Workers gradually become depressed or get roped into the weird conspiracy theories or far-right belief systems presented in the posts they endlessly review.

The article stressed how the time of the moderators is micromanaged, with the company allowing them only two fifteen-minute breaks and a half hour lunch during their shift and closely monitoring every minute of their time away from their cubicle. Cameras are everywhere to ensure constant supervision of employees and they are given monitors regularly during which a supervisor remotely watches their work.

People watch their coworkers go from being pleasant, well-adjusted people to conspiracy theorist crackpots and racist bigots

It doesn’t have to be that way. Despite the position we are in now of being bullied and dictated to we actually have the ability to flip the power dynamic. If none of us showed up to work one day the administration would be in a blind panic. They could get all of HR and the management team onto the phones and it would do nothing to stem the tide of lost profits and FCC fines that they would be facing. The company is ruined if we decide to act in a group and they don’t meet our demands. To quote the famous union organizer and IWW member Big Bill Haywood “all the workers have to do is fold their hands behind their backs and they have the capitalist class whipped.”

This is an incredible amount of power. It just has to be seized by us as a group. This is where we have to make a choice. We can stand up for ourselves and with our coworkers or we can aid the boss, either through our apathy or by being actively anti-union. You can decide you want to fight for your coworkers to have better benefits, for single mothers to be able to afford Christmas presents, for your cubicle neighbor to be able to get that cavity filled, for the person you see every day in the break room to have food security...

Or you can decide to let things stay as they are while Rob Engelke shops for another yacht and lives the life of absurd luxury and cartoonish, Scrooge-like greed that he has built for himself by paying low wages and keeping thousands of his fellow human beings in near-poverty.

It’s a battle between human dignity and the rich and powerful and it’s one that you play a role in. To get involved in the right side of the fight contact the CapTel Workers Union and encourage your friends at work to do so as well. Maybe you can even host a *Sorry To Bother You!* movie night for your friends and talk with them about the importance of taking a stance in this fight for workplace democracy.

Sorry To Bother You! Movie

Review

Boots Riley's directorial debut *Sorry To Bother You!* was one of my favorite movies of 2018. The plot follows Cassius ("Cash" to his friends) Green as he works at a call center called RegalView, feeling torn between his loyalty to his work friends who are trying to unionize and the job security and chance for a promotion that comes with siding with the company.

It's a movie that I believe will instantly resonate with anyone who has worked at CapTel. As Cash enters Regalview's call floor on his first day on the job we see the all-too-familiar setup of drab gray cubicles, computer monitors, and headsets. The company has a team meeting where management prattles on and on about their employees being a team and a family. "Does that mean we're getting a raise?" asks an employee, which management responds to with forced laughter.

One of the things that I love about *Sorry To Bother You!* is the way in which ordinary people are the heroes of the movie. When we watch the Hunger Games we all identify with Katniss and feel sure that we would stand up and fight back against an evil government like the Capitol. For most of us, our lives are closer to a Villager #7 than a Katniss.

Sorry To Bother You! forces you to consider what you would do because it is about a power struggle that we all take part in on a daily basis whether we know it or not. We all wake up and go to a job where we have no power despite being the ones who produce all profits for the company. We are not part of a team as we do not have a say in how the company is run or what our working conditions are. We are managed servants.

who wander the halls and mutter to each other about the earth being flat and using racial slurs, their minds slowly warped over time by the sheer deluge of vile content that flashes across their screen every day of their career with Cognizant.

CapTel's content is not nearly so consistently putrid, of course, but every captionist has memories of terrible calls that they carry with them. Obviously, I can't list examples here but I remember calls that honestly shocked me when I heard them.

Our job is also very grinding in nature and even when they are not explicitly terrible the calls we caption have the tendency to make many of us focus on our own mortality. For someone who struggles with depression, even as relatively mild as my case is, this can easily lead to a preoccupation with death. I've found myself in some incredibly dark holes during my time at CapTel. Surrounded by three drab, undecorated cubicle walls and with nothing to distract me but my thoughts, the call content has often led me into a spiraling tailspin of seasonal depression.

The job that we do is one that pays poorly despite how taxing it can be. We caption calls that deal with death, poverty, heartache, and racism. We deserve a raise for the emotional labor that we do and for a myriad of other reasons.

We deserve to be paid more.

We staff a trauma floor.

CapTel Workers Union Pickets CapTel for a Living Wage

A few months ago some members of the CapTel Workers Union demanded a company-wide raise in a march on the boss. We told the company that we would give them time to consider it but that we wanted an answer to be given in the next monthly team meeting. We argued that this decision would affect everyone in the workplace and that our coworkers deserve to hear if they are getting a raise or CapTel's explanation for why they don't believe their employees deserve an easily affordable wage increase.

Instead, CapTel called a single union member into a secret meeting to tell her that they believe their wages are "competitive." We decided that if CapTel would not have open and honest communication with our coworkers that we would tell them ourselves. We decided to demonstrate with a picket.

We gathered in the plaza outside of the Blue (or the 310W, as it is being rebranded). As the time of the picket approached our numbers steadily grew.

More than seventy workers and supporters gathered and we distributed T-shirts and picket signs made by union members. We began chanting and marching through the plaza using some of the classic union chants as well as one written by a CapTel Workers Union member specifically for this event: "We are the voice, we are the power / We all demand 15 an hour!"

Shortly after we had begun, police arrived and spoke with our designated police liaison. When asked if somebody had

Three picketers had planned speeches for this event and after hearing them speak other workers grabbed the megaphone and gave impromptu speeches, sharing their CapTel horror stories and their need for a living wage...

complained about us the police stated that CapTel admin had. However, despite what CapTel may wish, it is not illegal to protest low wages and police let us be.

Workers came out on their breaks to check out the picket, taking pamphlets and asking for CWU shirts which we happily gave to them. Some even dropped what they were doing to come march in the picket line with us. Drivers that were passing by beeped their horns in support and one woman rolled down her car window and yelled that CapTel "screwed her over" while she worked there and she was happy to see us demonstrating.

Three picketers had planned speeches for this event and after hearing them speak other workers grabbed the megaphone and gave impromptu speeches, sharing their CapTel horror stories and their need for a living wage and a workplace that listens to its workers.

The picket was an incredibly empowering and overwhelmingly positive experience. It was amazing to see so many CapTel workers come out to stand up for themselves and their coworkers and to demonstrate their willingness to fight to improve their workplace. Workers shared their contact information with us and asked how they could become further involved.

CapTel Workers Union is going to continue to organize, demonstrate, and fight for living wages. We will win.