

DETECT AND CORRECT

An office with cluttered desk, telephone, a couple of chairs. It can be a very conventional box set with rear and side walls. One wall should be big enough to contain a door leading to a secretary's office, which contains a smaller desk and less clutter.

Herbert Fowler, in his forties or fifties is seated at the larger desk. Gwendolyn Mullins, secretary, age 20 to 30, is seated at the desk outside Fowler's office.

A worker is just finishing the installation of a "device" on one wall in Fowler's office. The device can be about 6 to 8 inches wide, and 5 to 6 inches high.

Worker: There you go, sir. You're all set. *(The worker leaves)*

Herbert: Yeah, OK. Thanks. *(He hits the switch on the office intercom on his desk It doesn't work. He hits it again, then throws it to the floor)* Gwendolyn! Get it in here! *(Gwendolyn comes through the door with some hesitation)*

Gwendolyn: Yes Mr. Fowler?

Herbert: What was that guy doing in my office? What is that thing on the wall?

Gwendolyn: I don't know, I'm sure, Mr. Fowler. He just said that the building owner ordered them for all the offices in the building.

Herbert: Alright, alright. You never know anything! Get back to work!

Gwendolyn: Yes Mr. Fowler. *(She goes back to her desk)*

Herbert: Gwendolyn! Get my broker on the line! And hurry up about it!

Gwendolyn: *(from her desk)* Yes, Mr. Fowler, to be sure. *(Fowler's telephone rings)*

Herbert: *(Picks up the phone)* Lennie? Herb Fowler here. What? Well when would that be? Yeah, well let's aim for the middle of the week. Have your gal call my gal. *(An annoying buzzer sound is heard. It is coming from the direction of the "device" on the wall.)* Gwendolyn! Get it in here. What the hell is that racket? *(buzzer sounds again, with a different tone)* Is it coming from that "thing" on the wall? *(They both stare at the device)*

Gwendolyn: I don't know, I'm sure, Mr. Fowler. I'll have a look. *(She goes over to the wall which contains the "device")* There's a label here, Mr. Fowler. It says "this unit has been installed by Detect and Correct".

Herbert: Detect and correct? What the....

Gwendolyn: (*continuing to read the label*) “Detect and correct”. It says “If you don’t correct it, we’ll detect it”. There’s a phone number here but I can’t read all of it. Under the number it says “Don’t call us, we’ll call you.”

Herbert: Damn it, Gwendolyn...(*another buzz*)

Gwendolyn: (*continuing to read the label*) There are three push buttons on the panel. One says “ M-R, one says S-R, and the other one is labeled “ re-set button.”

Herbert: Well, push the re-set button!

Gwendolyn: (*Gwendolyn tries to push re-set*) I can’t, Mr. Fowler, it won’t let me. I think I have to push “M-R first”

Herbert: So push!

An authoritarian voice from offstage, (i.e. coming from the “device”): (*The voice should be mechanical, robotic, techspeak*) This is M-R speaking: Mild Reprimand . You said “Have your gal call my gal”. That is no longer acceptable in the workplace. Do not use that expression again. Drop the ‘hells” and ‘damns’ too. This is the end of the mild reprimand regarding this incident. You may now push re-set. (*Gwendolyn pushes re-set, and returns to her office*)

Herbert: Well, I’ll be a son-of-a-bitch! If that isn’t----(*the buzzer goes off again*) Gwendolyn! Get it back in here! Do what you have to do with that damn thing.(*She hits the M-R button*)

Offstage voice:(*Mechanical/robotic*) Well, well, Herbie. If you don’t tone it down, this is going to be a long day for you.

“Son-of-a- bitch” is OUT. Like totally OUT! This is your last mild reprimand. After this we phase into severe reprimand: “Verbum, sapientibus satis”, Herbie. If you don’t know what that means, ask your secretary, she’s probably smarter than you are. Furthermore, stop telling her to get it in here! That’s demeaning. You may now press re-set.

Herbert: Gwendolyn! Get it(*stops-thinks*) Gwendolyn, could you step in here, please. At your convenience, of course.

Gwendolyn: Yes, Mr. Fowler?

Herbert: That da---d-d-d (*he swallows hard so as not to say damn*) I mean, could you please tell me what :Verbum something, something means?

Gwendolyn: Yes, Mr Fowler, of course. Do you mean “ Verbum, sapientibus satis? It’s Latin for “a word to the wise is sufficient”.

Herbert: (*He motions Gwendolyn to come closer to his desk. He speaks with lowered voice, almost in a whisper*)) Thank you very much, Gwendolyn. Would you kindly step over to that device, and yank it out of the wall?

Gwendolyn: Oh, I couldn't do that Mr. Fowler. That would be like pulling the tag off a mattress. I don't think I want to do a stretch in Federal Prison.

Herbert: Have it your way, have it your way--- I mean, you're right of course, Gwendolyn, as always.

Gwendolyn: Thank you, Mr. Fowler. Anything else?

Herbert: No, thank you very kindly though for your assistance. *(Herbert makes a big, toothy, false smile)* I'm going home now. I have a splitting headache from all the noise and reprimands. *(He heaves a big sigh)* Tomorrow, Gwendolyn, you will see a new Herbert Fowler. A Herbert Fowler who is the very model of political correctness. Good night, Gwendolyn.

Gwendolyn: Good night Mr. Fowler. I look forward to seeing the 'new' Mr. Fowler tomorrow.

(Mr. Fowler leaves, Gwendolyn goes to the telephone on his desk, dials a number)

Gwendolyn: Hello. Have I reached the corporate offices of "Mullins Electronics? Yes, I would like to speak with Mr. Mullins please. Thank you, I'll wait.---- Hello, Daddy? Oh it worked beautifully. Thank you so much! He fell for all of it : detect and correct, the reprimand buttons, the whole works! Thanks for everything! It sent him home with a splitting headache. I think tomorrow is the beginning of a beautiful new relationship!