

"Must enjoy the outdoors"



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Get the dirt on the office

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Calgary Sun

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Our dirty little secret isn't a secret anymore.

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"The results from the samples of your office indicate that the telephone and monitors fail miserably," Lee Sutter, the operations co-ordinator for Manchester Wellness Corp., wrote in an e-mail.

One day earlier, Sutter had offered to check Sun newsroom equipment with the latest in contamination-testing equipment.

He brought in the handheld Lightning MVP, a portable probe used in the food-preparation industry.



COMPUTER BUGS ... Lee Sutter of Manchester Wellness Corp.

It reveals surface contamination — the presence of bacteria or chemicals — within seconds using a simple swab. (Sutter's company can also send away for more detailed results, such as the types and concentration of organisms, but our instant test was frightening enough.)

A "clean" reading would be somewhere in the range of 2.1 to 3.0, Sutter said.

First up: My telephone. After I dug it out from a pile of paper, anyway.

"It's reading 3.6. That's on the high end of the dirty," Sutter said, a little too loudly.

I managed a weak grin. My co-workers, meanwhile, pushed their chairs away ever so slightly, as if they were editing copy at a Calcutta leper colony.

"Test this guy's computer," I protested, trying to deflect the criticism.

Here was a perfect germ resort. It was a keyboard filled with old lunch crumbs and the grime of 10 talented but dirty fingers, the fingers of a writer whose identity I best not reveal.

"Oh, this is brutal," Sutter said, meticulously swiping Mr. Grubby's keys like a CSI episode.

Perfect.

My relief, however, was short-lived.

"That's so odd," my technician said, scratching his head.

"It's not positive. I can't believe it."

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The chairs moved again. Even more work colleagues cast accusatory stares, fearful I might do something rash, like breathe on their lunch or (gasp!) chew a pen.

Fortunately for me, there's always the photo desk.



"Is this a touch screen?" Sutter asked as I hustled him over to photo's 21-in. Dell monitor.

No, but it sure looked that way.

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Literally hundreds of fingerprints dotted the screen, the greasy imprints of well-meaning but overly tactile photographers and editors.

Sutter swabbed a small square and inserted it into the probe.

"This one shows 4.1. If you were my client, I would tell you that it requires immediate cleaning."

SUNshine Girl



To my relief (and to that of suddenly embattled photo editor Al Charest), Sutter said such results are typical.

"These are areas in offices that aren't getting regularly cleaned, if at all. They're in constant use. Plus, most people eat at their desks, so you end up with a lot of food residue.

"Most people don't realize how dirty their keyboards, telephones and fax machines are."

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Now we do. But outside of my freshly cleaned phone and Al's now-sparkling monitor, not much has changed.

Maybe good hygiene is overrated anyway. After all, Mr. Grubby never has to worry about someone changing the settings on HIS computer.

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