



**I Have No
Comfort
To Give**

I Have No Comfort To Give

from *Labor Saving Devices*

LABOR SAVING DEVICES IS A COLLECTION OF THREE TEN-MINUTE PLAYS
SUITABLE FOR READING OR STAGING

BY TOM BROWN

THE CAST

Mr. Feldt, the CEO
Ms. Phant, Assistant-to
Mr. Whips, Maintenance Worker

The play opens with Mr. Feldt at his desk, reading and talking simultaneously, with Ms. Phant attempting to brief him. Mr. Whips, from maintenance, dusts and cleans around the perimeter of the stage, never really nearing the desk, until...

PHANT: Mr. Feldt, this is the time to discuss upcoming holidays. Summer will soon be gone and from Labor Day on, we're looking at fall and winter, in terms of closings, bonuses, and such.

FELDT: Let's talk about this in a month or two.

PHANT: Oh, but sir! We must talk it over now. Otherwise, we can't arrange for work shift problems — and we can't plan for inventory controls since we're now on a Just-In-Time arrangement with all our major vendors.

FELDT: Very well.

PHANT: I guess I should start by saying...

FELDT: But just hit me with the questions you can't answer yourself. We've run this business for 39 years, counting the time my father was CEO. We had holidays all those years, and you were present for most of them. So, what's so big you can't just write this up and have me quick-read it, make changes, and hand it back to you?

PHANT: Well, put that way, uh... I guess... [pause]

FELDT: Anything else? I want to review these financial statements.

PHANT: I do thank you for your trust in me, sir. If I scan... uh... let's see. The list of adjustments and changes would seem to be pretty much as it was last year, yes. I guess, with the company numbers being what they are this year, perhaps we should at least talk now about the amount of time off for Labor Day, Thanksgiving, and the Christmas holidays? It's a lot of holidays at once, doesn't it seem?

FELDT: Yes! I recall saying at the end of second quarter that we have got to change things. I can put a lot more money to the bottom line if we can get a little more reasonable about all this damn time off.

PHANT: Get reasonable? I'm not sure I understand...

FELDT: What's reasonable about excessive time off...

PHANT: Excessive?

FELDT: There's *nothing* reasonable about excessive time off!

PHANT: [pause] Mr. Feldt, we have been changing a lot of the arrangements with the work force this year — going to three shifts, asking people to take work home, reducing allowable vacation days, shifting health care payments to the workers instead of our insurance providers. Time off for the big fall and winter holidays is probably something we shouldn't tamper with?

FELDT: Ms. Phant, I *own* this company — or at least the majority of outstanding shares. I can tamper with anything anytime I want to. Is that not clear to you?

PHANT: Yes, sir. It was. It is. Clear. [pause]

FELDT: You know, running this company is hard enough without... without...

PHANT: Mr. Feldt, most of our workers are at their limits. They're working so hard. They're so loyal. They really want this company to succeed.

FELDT: Then, they should be willing to work harder... and longer... and not expect so many holidays... Follow my logic, here Ms. Phant?

PHANT: Time off with family and friends is one of the few comforts we can provide them.

FELDT: Good Lord, *comfort!* Comfort?

PHANT: Well...

FELDT: We now have competitors attacking us from five different countries! Sure, we're number one or two in most markets, but this is a business — first and foremost. *A business!* I have no comfort to give! Just discussing this makes my blood pressure rise.

PHANT: Do you need... one of your pills?

FELDT: No.

PHANT: Perhaps if we reduce the days that workers get for the major holidays, we can make up for some of that by a slight increase in their year-end bonus?

FELDT: Ms. Phant, I'm not sure you understand the situation. I guess that's why I'm the CEO here and you are... It has taken me days and days of meetings with management to get them to realize that this company needs to chop costs in the worst possible way.

PHANT: Yes, you were saying that just last Monday...

FELDT: That's how we doubled our stock price in the last year, by padding the bottom line with all the wasted costs that were holding back our financial performance. You were in many of those meetings? You even prepared the overheads. Is your memory slipping? I talked about this last Monday!

PHANT: My memory is fine! Umm... I'm sorry. I did not mean to...

FELDT: Ms. Phant...

PHANT: What I'm trying to say is that many of our workers would rather have an extra day or two off around the holidays rather than more money, uh... but, with any new plans to reduce workers' time off, then the least we can do...

FELDT: The least we can do! Yes! That's the spirit: what is *the least* we can do?

PHANT: Well, we now give a day's wages as a bonus for each full year an employee has served. And, well, we have many, many long-time employees!

FELDT: Change it to one day's wages for each *five* full years an employee has served. Do that, will you? And write up a memo that blames it on Wall Street or overseas competitors or whatever sounds good. Slam all those damn Wall Street wizards for making us do this!

PHANT: But our profitability is at an all-time high! Surely, you will re-consider.
Perhaps... perhaps... every two years ought to be the... I mean... at least...

FELDT: I don't like people who say "But!" to me.

PHANT: [pause] Sir, I do not mean to belabor this issue, but many will take this as a sign that you don't care the least about the people who work here... who have worked here... for so long... Now, what I'll do is prepare some analysis that shows how much we'll save if we give them one day for a year, two years, three years...

FELDT: MS. PHANT! MS. PHANT! MS. ... MS. ...

[gasps, grabs his chest, falls in front of desk]

PHANT: Mr. Feldt! Oh, no! Mr. Feldt! MR. WHIPS, COME HERE. QUICK! Mr. Feldt... Do you hear me?

WHIPS: He's had a heart attack. Better give him CPR. And fast!

PHANT: Mr. Feldt! Mr. Feldt! CPR? What? CPR? I don't know...

WHIPS: Let me... Look out... I took the course we offered during lunch hours... last year... Let me...

PHANT: I'm calling HR... *They'll* get a doctor. We need a doctor! [to phone] Human Resources? Hello? I'm in... This is Ms. Phant... I'm in Mr. Feldt's office. We need a doctor. *Call a doctor!*

WHIPS: Look out... Look out...

[extended CPR activity]

WHIPS: [breathless] He's... huh... breath... He's... huh... breath... ing...

PHANT: Mr. Whips... you... you... saved him!

WHIPS: I think... I say *I think*... he's breathing now!

PHANT: You? Saved our CEO?

WHIPS: Breathing... he's breathing... He's breathing.

PHANT: Why, Mr. Whips? You saved Mr. Feldt. Why, I...

WHIPS: He needed comfort, Ms. Phant. His heart... he just... it stopped. I was here. He needed help. I...

**For more information about the author,
go to <http://www.tombrown.us>.**

