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August 20, 2013

Charlie Dolman
Operations Manager
Burning Man
995 Market Street
15th Floor
San Francisco, CA 94103

Dear Mr. Dolman:

My name is Palmer Parker, playa name Gameshow. I held the position of DPW Dispatcher for 10 years, manager for nine of those. On March 13th of this year my immediate supervisor, Playground, informed me by telephone that Burning Man's new Operations Manager "wished a closer working relationship between ESD and DPW Dispatch" therefore my employment with Burning Man was terminated. This effectively also fired my wife Katy from her five year position as Dispatcher and my de facto assistant manager though no one from Burning Man has contacted her directly about that. It also served to eliminate my step-daughter Aimee's (Paws Off) two-year volunteer position under Bette June in Art Support Services and removed my two step-sons' (Andrew "L'il Dog" and Benny "Rooster Tail") two-year volunteer efforts with Shelly in the Commissary...

Over the months since that phone call I have spent many, many hours – including way too many times waking in the wee hours of the morning – processing what happened and why. This letter is one result of that pondering and, for clarity's sake, it is not an effort to regain employment by Burning Man.

To the best of my knowledge you and I, sir, have never met or communicated directly in any way prior to my writing this – I didn't know your name until I went looking for it on the Burning Man website after that phone call. No grievance has ever been filed against me, no request for mediation has been made toward me, and no conflict resolution efforts have been initiated by anyone but me. I have never been accused of theft, lying, assault, or any other criminal act at Burning Man. I will grant you that I was accused of sending a page about a death

to a Board member at a very early time one morning. As that method of relaying such news would be entirely inappropriate regardless of the hour, when I asked for proof of the page I did not remember having sent, Joseph Pred told me that the paging log was corrupted and he was therefore unable to provide that record. In truth I may not have even been on shift that night despite what the posted Dispatch schedule listed.

There were no discussions of need for personal improvement plan or other HR-related activity (Charles of ESD COMM – a Burning Man contractor rather than employee – threatened on occasion that he would talk to HR about me or others who commented on the poor state of the radio system...), no mention of probation or other change in my Burning Man employment status. I was directed to not speak ill of the state of radios last year and I followed that directive to the best of my ability. I was honest in my ten years of post-event manager EMBER reports. Given the very succinct presentation of the reason I was given for your firing me, I can only surmise that you based your decision on information, documentation, opinion, and/or otherwise provided by Joseph in his position as head of Burning Man's Emergency Services Division (I find it ironic that I had, through my supervisor, requested mediation with him in 2011 and he refused). It is a sadness to me that the friendship he and I once shared has also been a victim of the continued state of radio service his department provides to DPW.

My primary concern as DPW Dispatch Manager was always safety with a close second being effective, reliable, and efficient radio service. The quality of the tools Burning Man provides to DPW Dispatch to establish the umbrella of communication creating that safety and efficiency is controlled entirely by ESD: DPW Dispatch is *completely* dependent on that department for equipment and programming.

Among myself and the Dispatchers who worked with me it had long been a grave concern that we would be unable to respond to an emergency because we could not hear a radio call or could not be heard when we attempted to transmit. A life lost or a serious injury is a horrible burden for a Dispatcher to bear even when equipment works as it should. And it appears to me that rather than work to solve the real problem(s) you chose, instead, to be convinced by Joseph to kill the messenger. Your action has relieved me of responsibility if someone may suffer injury or death because of defective radios but, in doing so, I believe you have taken that responsibility on yourself.

I have no idea whether you've read any of my EMBER reports or not. They have long included appreciations for jobs well done and concerns for shortcomings. Examples from last year's EMBER (sort of extra-appropriate since when I added this example to my letter it was Fence Day 2013 and congrats to the crew there for this year's record time):

1. IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT WORKED WELL AND WHAT DIDN'T THIS YEAR.

WHAT WORKED WELL:

- 4508 (CONTAINS THE DISPATCH OFFICE) WAS IN POSITION IN THE DEPOT-TO-BE ON FENCE DAY MORNING EVEN BEFORE THE FIRST LEG OF TRASH FENCE T-STAKES WERE IN ~ THANK YOU INSANE AND HEAT!! INSANE WAS ALSO KIND ENOUGH TO TAKE US TO BREAKFAST – IN 4508 - ONCE THE COMMISSARY WAS UP AND RUNNING.
- SUPPORT FROM THE IT DEPARTMENT WAS, YET ANOTHER YEAR IN A ROW, STELLAR ~ COMPLETE WITH NEW (FASTER) COMPUTER, NEW (IT WORKED!!) PRINTER, ALL OF WHICH, ALONG WITH VOIP PHONE, WERE INSTALLED AND OPERATIONAL BY 2PM ON FENCE DAY. IT STAFF ALSO CHECKED IN ON US REGULARLY THROUGHOUT OUR TIME ON PLAYA AND, WHEN DISPATCH CALLED WITH A QUESTION OR PROBLEM, THEY RESPONDED IMMEDIATELY. IT IS TRULY WONDERFUL TO BE SO FULLY AND PLEASANTLY SERVED AND SUPPORTED BY THAT CREW.
- SUPPORT FROM MANY FORMERLY KNOWN AS SENIOR STAFF AND/OR DPW COUNCIL OF DARKNESS.

WHAT DID NOT WORK WELL:

- RADIOS
 - SADLY THIS IS YET ANOTHER YEAR'S EMBER IN WHICH I'M NOT SURE WHERE TO BEGIN.
 - DISPATCH WAS EXPECTING TO HAVE UP TO FIVE MOBILE (POWERFUL) RADIOS PROGRAMMED CORRECTLY AND COMPLETELY INSTALLED ON FENCE DAY IF NOT SOONER (THE RADIOS COULD'VE BEEN INSTALLED WHEN 4508 WAS ON THE RANCH). DISPATCH WAS WITHOUT EVEN A SINGLE MOBILE RADIO UNTIL TUESDAY (FENCE DAY WAS MONDAY SO THAT'S ESSENTIALLY TWO DAYS INTO TRANSP0) WHEN I (WITH PERMISSION) WENT TO THE RANCH AND REMOVED THE MOBILE FROM THE COMMON SHOP AND MOVED IT TO DISPATCH. TWO MORE ANALOG MOBILES WERE INSTALLED ON WEDNESDAY.
 - THE RENTAL BRICK TO RENTAL DIGITAL SNAFU WAS A HORRENDOUS TIME AND ENERGY SUCK. IT SET DISPATCH BACK IN TERMS OF OFFICE ORGANIZATION, STAFF TRAINING, AND PLAYA-WIDE DISPATCH SERVICES WHICH DOES NOT INCLUDE THE AMOUNT OF WORK TIME RADIO USERS LOST IN THEIR PART OF THE SWAPPING PROCESS.
 - CHANNELS 4 (PRIMARY DPW ANALOG CHANNEL) AND CHANNEL 911ALT (FORMERLY 912, THE BRICK RADIO'S VERSION OF ESD911) WERE TAKEN DOWN WITHOUT WARNING TO DISPATCH OR OUR USERS.
 - THE MORE DIGITAL RADIO USERS THERE WERE, THE MORE DPW'S PRIMARY CHANNEL BECAME UNUSABLE DUE TO HARMONIC INTERFERENCE.

- WHEN 4508 WAS SWITCHED FROM GENERATOR TO LIGHT TOWER FOR POWER POST-EVENT THE UNINTERRUPTIBLE POWER SUPPLY (UPS) PROTECTING THE MOBILE RADIOS WENT CRAZY. SOLUTION WAS TO BYPASS THE UPS (THERE WERE NO COMM TECHS ON PLAYA OR IN GERLACH). THAT WOULD NOT HAVE OCCURRED IF THE RADIOS HAD BEEN POWERED AS REQUESTED IN LAST YEAR'S EMBER.
- RADIO COMMUNICATION WITH THE RANCH BECAME DIFFICULT TO IMPOSSIBLE ONCE THE SWITCH TO DIGITAL OCCURRED. THAT PRESENTED SAFETY AND LOGISTICAL SIDE EFFECTS.

If you would like to read about my history at Burning Man, view, pictures, and browse other information you are welcome to visit www.gameshow.me. If you would like to learn more of the DPW Dispatch side of ESD/Dispatch history, I can provide that as well.

I started this letter several months ago and let it sit, I'm not usually the letter-writing type in a situation like this. Much more likely, typically, to recognize the hierarchy and move on. But I keep coming back to the issue of the safety of those on the playa. I have spoken of my firing with very few in the Burning Man organization (or elsewhere for that matter except by way of explaining why I wasn't going to TTITD to those who expected me to be gone by now). It was suggested to me at one point that a way of airing my safety concerns might be by filing a grievance myself. I thought about that suggestion for a while and decided to try that route rather than airing dirty laundry, so to speak. I called Playground and asked her what procedure there might be. She said she would get back to me in a day or two and she did, saying that there was no procedure but if I'd like to write a letter to her she would forward it to Human Resources or, if I preferred, I could write to HR directly. As I had been told in March that it was you who had made the firing decision I have decided to send this letter to you instead with copies to the Board, Executive Committee, DPW Council of Darkness, and others in the Burner community.

The thought occurred to me last week that though I had been fired in that March phone call with Playground that there had been nothing provided by Burning Man in written or electronic form documenting that action. I called Playground on August 8th and asked her to provide that documentation. In her reply on the 16th she cc'd both you and Kat in HR. Her email was as follows:

HEY THERE,

SORRY FOR THE LONG DELAY IN THIS EMAIL. HERE GOES.

IN MARCH, I CALLED GAMESHOW TO DISCUSS OUR NEEDS FOR THE 2013 SEASON. I

TOLD HIM THAT WE WERE BRINGING ESD IN TO WORK MORE CLOSELY WITH THE DPW DISPATCH DEPARTMENT SO WE WOULD HAVE MORE COHESION WITH THE COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM. GAMESHOW COMMENTED THAT IT DIDN'T SEEM LIKE THERE WAS A POSITION FOR HIM. I CONFIRMED THAT WE WOULD NOT BE BRINGING HIM BACK FOR THE 2013 SEASON.

AS MENTIONED PREVIOUSLY, GAMESHOW, IF YOU HAVE ANY CONCERNS OR FEEDBACK THAT YOU'D LIKE TO SHARE WITH HR, WE ENCOURAGE YOU TO DO THAT. ALTHOUGH WE DON'T HAVE A FORM, YOU CAN JUST PUT DOWN YOUR THOUGHTS IN WRITING AND SEND THAT TO KAT AT KAT.STEINMETZ@BURNINGMAN.COM.

IF YOU NEED ANYTHING FURTHER FROM ME, PLEASE LET ME KNOW. I PROMISE IT WILL BE A FASTER TURN AROUND TIME.

PG

SENT WITH MIND BULLETS

And there's that letter suggestion again...so--along with the emailed reply I sent to her moments ago (on 8/20/13 cc'ing you, Kat, and Marian), I am yet another step closer to sending this letter to you:

I KNOW FULL WELL IT IS THE BUSIEST TIME OF YEAR FOR YOU BUT I, TOO, AM SORRY YOUR REPLY REQUIRED OVER A WEEK TO BE FORMULATED WHICH INCLUDED NO REPLY TO MY VOICEMAIL TWO DAYS AFTER A RESPONSE WAS EXPECTED NOR TO MY EMAIL A DAY AFTER THAT... I ALSO HAVE COME TO UNDERSTAND THAT I ERRED IN NOT SENDING PERTINENT INFORMATION OVER THE YEARS TO HR AT THE TIME THE INCIDENTS OCCURRED. THERE HAVE BEEN MANY LESSONS IN THIS FOR ME.

ON WEDNESDAY, MARCH 13TH, WHEN YOU RETURNED MY EARLIER PHONE CALLS TO YOU, COBRA, AND HAZMATT, I INITIALLY THOUGHT IT WAS TO TELL ME HOW TO GET AROUND THE VOICEMAIL FEATURE OF THE BURNING MAN PHONE SYSTEM AS I HAD REQUESTED IN MY MESSAGES. I HAD CALLED TO SEE ABOUT GETTING MORE BUSINESS CARDS...WHICH BECAME A MOOT QUESTION IMMEDIATELY.

ON MARCH 14TH I DOCUMENTED WHAT I HEARD IN OUR PHONE CALL THE PREVIOUS DAY IN A POSTING TO FACEBOOK. IT SAID, IN PART: "I RECEIVED A TELEPHONE CALL YESTERDAY IN WHICH I WAS TOLD THAT THE NEW OPS MANAGER WISHES THERE TO BE A CLOSER WORKING RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ESD AND DPW THEREFORE MY SERVICES AS DPW DISPATCH MANAGER ARE NO LONGER DESIRED." THE VERBIAGE "THE NEW OPS MANAGER WISHES THERE TO

BE A CLOSER WORKING RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ESD AND DPW" WAS VERBATIM (BELIEVE ME, THAT PHONE CALL IS VERY CLEAR IN MY MIND).

ON JULY 17TH I RECEIVED EMAILS SENT TO THE BM RADIO LIAISON LIST, THE EMAILS WERE FROM JOSEPH PRED. ONE IN PARTICULAR ASKED THAT THE RECIPIENTS REVIEW THE LIST AND ADVISE IF ANYONE NEEDS TO BE REMOVED, UPDATED, ETC. I REPLIED ON JULY 19TH BY SAYING, "HAVING ACCOMPLISHED MY FIRING MONTHS AGO, WOULD YOU AT LEAST BE KIND ENOUGH TO UPDATE YOUR LIST...THREE RADIO-LIAISON EMAILS IN ONE DAY SEEMS A BIT MUCH." I CC'D MARIAN AND PLAYGROUND. ON THE 21ST JOSEPH REPLIED, "PALMER, THE LIST WAS UPDATED SOME DAYS AGO. SORRY ABOUT THE EMAIL FLURRY AS WE DID OUT (SIC) ANNUAL UPDATE TO THE LIST. - JOSEPH" NO CONTRADICTION TO MY STATEMENT OF HIS CAUSING ME TO BE FIRED WAS OFFERED.

IN SHORT, YOU WERE TASKED WITH FIRING ME, WHICH YOU DID: MY DEPARTURE WAS IN NO WAY VOLUNTARY. SINCE THAT PHONE CALL THERE HAVE BEEN MULTIPLE OPPORTUNITIES FOR THOSE IN THE BURNING MAN HIERARCHY TO DISPUTE MY STATEMENTS AND, UNTIL NOW, NONE HAVE.

PALMER

SENT WITH A HEAVY HEART.

Being removed from participation is a very painful experience. There are many who donate themselves to the playa with a fierce yet tender love. It's a chosen family which makes it, in ways, even more important than the blood family one is born into. Likely I will never see many of them again. The laughter, the camaraderie, the drunkenness, the hugs, the stepping up when help is needed, the golf cart races... And, truth be told, I *am* a radio addict—that withdrawal is distressing as well.

The chances of our meeting are rather slim, I suspect, so I will tell you here what my 59 years of experience have taught me: A manager should strive to acquire information from *all* directly involved parties especially when a conflict is apparent. The more complete the picture, the better the chance to solve the problem.

I will say I've heard third-hand that COMM will be providing all digital radios this year and they believe radio service will work really well this season. Though they have expressed that belief pretty much yearly, I continue to hope that it will be true this year. Lives depend on it despite Joseph's statements that DPW Dispatch does not deal with life and death matters.

I will close with this thought from
<http://afterburn.burningman.com/12/org/consensus.html>

AFTERBURN REPORT 2012

CONSENSUS, HIERARCHY, AUTHORITY AND POWER

In the words of Larry Harvey:

However, we should always remember that the single most common mistake people make when they misuse these tools of management is to somehow forget their first lesson. If your actions don't respect the spirit of a gift; if you are jealous or possessive of power, if you withhold information, if you blame other people, if you refuse to give credit, and if you ignore the abilities of others -- then you are probably abusing your authority. All of our work together is in service to a gift, and this should always be regarded as the source of the power that holds us together.

I believe there is a significant difference between simply blaming other people and providing information in an effort to correct problems.

Since that phone call last March I have been asked by a number of people what happened ~ what did *I* do to be fired? I have been largely silent to this point which I have come to believe does nothing to shed light on why you decided to terminate my position. It serves Joseph and Charles (whom I assume is still Burning Man's primary radio programmer) but not Playa safety. I continue to believe that I did my job and did it well. And I will tell you that it hurts my heart, hearing the clan gathering whilst my family and I must sit it out...

Sincerely,

Palmer Parker

PS It being the 20th of August today, I expect I will get this letter sent off within a day or two. I want you to know that, along with what I've already said in this letter, being fired means my family and I will not have the pleasure, the absolute joy, of sharing in the Playa virginity of one of the finest people in my heart and life at her first-ever Burning Man as a DPW Fuel wench. She'll be working across the street from where we lived behind the Depot for years...we'd have seen her and her sparkle lots of times a day. Would've caught her eye at morning meetings and smiled. Would've introduced her to sooo many of the people who are so important to us in that chosen family, DPW. That joy, that peak experience--aw, g'wan, take a look http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peak_experience), sir, you have taken that from us.