

# Trigger-Happy or Just Straight Shooting?

- Tom Garfield

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Mr. Bliponship was not happy. I figured that out pretty fast. His call came late on a gray, wet Thursday afternoon. I was in the office – unfortunately, 'cause that meant I had to take the call. But that's my job. I wear a tie and carry a Day-Timer; I'm a P.A., a private administrator. Taking nasty calls or just sweating out long board meetings – it's what I get paid for.

My secretary, a sweet gal with lots of front office experience behind her, buzzed me and let me know I had a hot one on the line.

“Tom, hang on to your chair, Mr. Bliponship is on line one, and he doesn't sound happy.”

I thanked her, and my facial muscles uncontrollably twitched as I punched the blinking red light...

“Well hi there, Bob!” I blurted cheerfully. “Getting kind of damp out there, isn't it? What can I do for you?” I really hoped I could do something for him, rather than have him do something to me.

“Garfield! Don't give me that happy-go-lucky, you-don't-suspect-anything's-wrong attitude! You know what I calling about...you shot at my sister again last night. After all she puts up with each day in her job, and then you go and...and...” he couldn't continue and sputtered incoherently in his anger.

“...and told the newspaper reporter my opinions of government schools, right?”, I finished helpfully, I hoped.

“Yeah! That's right! She read that article in the paper last night and called me in tears. What kind of P.A. are you? Didn't they teach you about shooting off your mouth at innocent bystanders in whatever bubblegum joint you got your license from?”

“Well, Bob, as a matter of fact, the “bubblegum joint” I got most of my administrator training from was the state university here. You know, the university that teaches future “public” school teachers? Anyhow, they didn't train us to watch where or how we expressed our opinions. I kind of think they didn't expect us to have any opinions worth expressing. But I am sorry your sister got hurt in the crossfire last night...”

“Oh, sure, that's easy for you to say! What in the world did you mean by that thing you said...just a minute... yeah, here it is: “... government education in the United States is possibly that last, best holdout of socialistic training in the world. Attempts to “fix” this flawed-from-the-start system are as foolish as it would have been for the U.S. to send money and arms to the old guard Soviet Communists in 1989.” What are you saying there? You calling my sister a commie, just 'cause she teaches in the public schools!?”

The phone was getting warmer in my hand, or maybe it was just the heat emanating from it. “Whoa, Bob. I certainly wasn't calling your sister a commie. I have relatives teaching in that system, too, and they aren't commies either. Tell you what, let's meet for lunch at Eric's grill tomorrow and we can discuss this more. My treat. What do you say?”

“Well, ok. I'll meet you there at noon. Don't bring any backup.” Click.

As I hung up the receiver, I mentally wiped the brow, and heaved a sigh. But my relaxing was short-lived. My office door opened and a short, lovely brunette sauntered in. Without a word, she came and stood by my chair. Close. Too close for my comfort. Her hand touched my shoulder softly as she purred, “Mr. Garfield, I hear you’re a very capable P.A. I need help with a very special problem. Do you think you could give me some of your time? HmMMMM?”

Gathering my tumbled senses, I thought quickly. I instinctively knew what she wanted. And I didn’t want any part of it, not now, not ever.

“Sorry, sweetheart. I, uh, have a pretty important case, er, course to work on just now. Why don’t you ask some other stooge to help you out?”

“Oh come on, Tom. The other guys are busy, and besides, I know you are pretty adept at unjamming the copier. Please, honey?” Well, when she put it that way, I knew I had to help her. I mean, how do you say no to your wife, especially when she has a jammed photocopier slowing her down?

The next noon found me at Eric’s grill, sitting on a stool, leaning on the counter and awaiting Bob’s entrance. He finally came in. He looked like a week of bad weather – stormy, you know. I waved him to the stool next to me, and after ordering two Mega-burger specials, we got down to business.

“Bob, I want you to know again that I meant no offense to your sister. She’s got a tough job and is probably not very appreciated by her students or the parents.”

“Boy, you got that right! The stories she tells me. . . Look, I’m sorry I blew up at you yesterday. But I just don’t understand why you feel you gotta take shots at the public schools. Wouldn’t it be better to just brag up your school? I mean, our kids are doing really well there, and we tell folks how much we like it. Do you have to make the public schools sound so bad?”

I tried to choose my words carefully, especially as they came out around bites of Mega-burger. “If you only knew how many times I have wanted to pop off a few rounds in their direction, you’d realize that I am the soul of restraint. Do you read the papers? Do you see what they’re doing to those kids? Believe me, I don’t go looking for stories; they come to me with Technicolor detail from parents wanting to enroll their kids. No, I know there isn’t much good in shooting at the government schools, with their deeply rooted religion of social Darwinistic engineering. Besides, nailing their problems is as tough as shooting at the Kibbie Dome – you can’t miss, if you follow me. But sometimes I feel like I need to be the watcher on the wall in Ezekiel – you know, giving the alarm so that at least the blood isn’t on my hands.”

We talked and ate for a bit longer. We found we agreed more than either of us had thought. Bob drove off and I walked back to school just as it started to rain again. As I sloshed through the puddles and the water dripped off my hat, I reflected upon Bob. He wasn’t such a bad guy. Who knows? Maybe this could be the beginning of a beautiful friendship.