

Noel Osborne 1965 First 6 Months

Initiation; Intimidation; Harassment

Soils Laboratory

Initiation

It was a new purpose built brick building with offices storage area for equipment, a preparation area and an insulated area for the noisy sieve analysis shakers. There was also an area for individuals to undertake soils analysis testing. A separate small kitchen to boil water and make tea and /or coffee with individuals supplying their own coffee jar or tea bags. A single toilet and wash basin was also included in the floor plan. It was a well laid out building with a contract cleaner to regularly clean the floor of the laboratory area and bench tops .

It also undertook concrete test cylinder strength testing for 7 day and 28 day tests for its bridge construction and precast yard.

In 1965 “political correctness” had not been derived, sexism, racism and bullying was tolerated and in some areas encouraged.

New members had to go through a ritual introduction. In the CRB office environment the separate building with its own team leader was ‘free to undertake his own initiation session. Was it known in the main office ? I didn’t know and in the first two weeks or so the new comer put up with it and lodged no complaints.

So, what was AC’s first initiation? Sample splitting . Sounds okay some heavy bags of road making materials through a splitter to achieve a sample for sieve analysis, another for Plasticity index and of course a jar of the raw material which was labelled and stored in a converted broom cupboard. It had multiple rows of fitted shelves from the floor to the 8 foot ceiling. They were wrap around in a U shape with the open area just wide and deep enough for a human with his arms above his head. There was also a solid timber door which were in fact Dutch-doors that could be opened from the outside and individually top or bottom. When the new initiation subject entered to place the sample on a shelf above his head the door was shut and locked from the outside pinning the new recruit against the shelves with the door firmly on his back . He was left to stew for about half an hour now hot and sweaty and growing cranky the bottom half was opened but there wasn’t enough space to shimmy down and out.

A few more minutes elapsed and one of the older staff RN offered to help and grabbed ones pants to guide you down . that didn’t work and although I later guess he could have lifted both feet and allowed the knees to bend. Instead, he reached up to undo the individual’s pants and shoes and lower underpants to the knees. The senior staff could then pat and squeeze. Now initiated the rest of the door was opened and the initiated was allowed out: And had to walk back into the group area to reclaim his pants to the cheers of all. Past the first test.

No Halm done. I had heard stories from other work places much worse. A lit roll of toilet paper rolled under the toilet door igniting the young mans pants around his ankles. Yes, he did a quick exit trying to put out the fire but had bad burns to his ankles and legs. And a very angry mother; but no charges were laid!

Another worse example was an apprentice plumber and a cousin of a young fellow I worked with on a club service project from Benalla. He told me the story; At the end of his cousin's first work-week, he was given a demonstration of the correct way to apply plumbing sealant for "crack sealing" from a tube.

They stripped him and applied it between his buttocks before pulling up his briefs (an edited account) to hold it in place. He could hardly move, could drive home couldn't bend or sit. The cousin found him, laid in the back of his Ute and took him home His mother did report the incident to the police but again no charges were laid. The Plumber allegedly banned that initiation method.

I did meet the fellow at a later date and thought of that story but yes it went unsaid.

The second intimidation ritual was the 1960's form of the modern day drink spiking. Back then to harass and intimidate or embarrass the individual they would add laxative to food or drink .

Harassment.

The laboratory had an appointed soils technician I will call Klaus he travelled daily from the Wangaratta area in his own car and in the two months that I had in the soils laboratory he was regularly harassed, isolated, teased and ridiculed. I thought their attitude was disgusting and raised it with two of the younger local members of the staff. They didn't like it either and didn't participate but didn't have any influence over the team leader of his bullying buddies.

Towards the end of my 6 months of the 3 stage training period, the news was relayed to staff that "Klaus" was involved in a fatal car accident driving to work. He had hit a large trailer rig head on and died instantly. The coroner ruled it accidental death. I thought back to my first 2 months and knew differently.