The Mouse on the Mouse Pad

As any GKLS "old timer" knows, Building 845 wasn't all office space and cubicles. Scattered throughout the building were a number of labs, which were mainly just open areas with a variety of different power outlets for testing the never-ending array of printers and accessory equipment. The biggest of these labs in 845 was the huge, double-ended room in the southwest side of the building. At various times of its existence, it had been the DocuTech lab, the Blackbird lab, and much later on the iGen3 lab. But this story takes place during its transition between products, when there were a few DocuTech 6135 and 6180 machines mixed in with some less speedy products.

I had been working in the lab on a previously peaceful October afternoon, doing whatever it is that I used to do, when the quiet was suddenly pierced by the sound of a loud scream. It wasn't the kind of sound that you'd hear when someone lost their data to a PC crash, (the terrible Blue Screen of Death), or when an individual stubbed a toe. No, this was far worse; the abject sound of sheer terror in its most primeval form.

Quick as a flash I turned around and witnessed back of a blue dress flying out of the north exit door at light speed, accompanied by a voice shrieking…"A MOUSE!!!"

Hmm. Now this was interesting. Since the person fleeing the room was obviously in distress over the presence of this "mouse," I quickly deduced that it was not of the variety that you'd use to control your computer cursor. They had obviously come in contact with the rodent variety of mouse, which probably inhabited the building from time to time. In order to better assess the situation, I sauntered across the lab and got down on my hands and knees and looked across the carpeted surface underneath the printers. And there, lo and behold, was a mouse!

Unfortunately, this mouse looked as though it had seen better days. I don't know whether it was injured, poisoned, or just old and feeble, but its movements were definitely slow and painful. Had it been a human, I would have recommended it be placed in an assisted living facility. However, since it was simply an old rodent, I decided to move it outside the building where it could live out the remainder of its life in its natural surroundings.

But how could I capture this creature and move it without harming it? I opted to gain the assistance of two friends, Mike Rice and Christian Redder, both of whom sat within spitting distance (for a human) of the lab. They both readily volunteered, and gathered a collection of mouse-trapping materials for the endeavor.

Fully armed with a large flat piece of cardboard (to slide under the mouse) and an empty cardboard box (to clomp over it), we slowly and stealthily opened the door to the lab, tip-toeing our way in unison across the room until we were standing at the LPMWS (Last Place Mouse Was Sighted). Then, like a well-choreographed ballet troop, we all stooped down until our heads were touching the ground, giving us a birds-eye view under the printer. That's when we encountered our first problem; there was no mouse. We looked one way, and then the other, but the aged critter had seemingly vanished into thin air. He was nowhere to be seen.

After another few minutes of searching, Mike Rice suddenly discovered something unusual. Looking underneath the DocuTech 6180, he asked, "Do you see the first stacker module, just to the right of the Print Engine?" Both Christian and I agreed that we did. "Now, do you see that other back caster wheel…the one with the ears?" He had indeed been found, having remained within a few feet of his original sighting.

With Christian moving around the back of the machine, and Mike taking up a position to my right, we strategically slid the cardboard under the machine and also under the mouse. It wasn't easy, because the mouse (although feeble) was not enthused by the process. It was made even more difficult because by now, the three of us were laughing so hard that no one could keep our hands stable. It was a bit like playing one of those children's games with the ball rolling through the maze, and the whole thing being controlled by two sets of gimbals that tilt the maze one way or the other. Except that the ball had a mind of its own, and gravity alone was not in charge.

Within about ten minutes, we had centered the mouse on the "mouse pad," and had slapped the box down over the top to completely ensnare our visitor. Only then did we realize that we have made another tactical mistake; the sides of the box came out to the very edges of the bottom cardboard, so there was literally no room for error. It took all three of us to lift the improvised enclosure and move it VERY slowly across the lab. Someone else (I think Jim Knapp), opened the back door, near Ralph Hill's office, and we proceeded at a morbidly slow pace down the hall, still in hysterics. It reminded me of a scene from the days of the Black Death in Europe, with the undertakers calling out "Bring out your dead!"

The story did have a happy ending, as we successfully navigated the final few feet of hallway and out the south entrance of Building 845. We tilted the box and lifted top, releasing the now-liberated (although still hobbled) mouse to scurry off into the shrubbery. To this day, I still think it had a rather annoyed expression on its face, as though to say "you fools…did it really take all three of you to get this done?"

So now you know the answer to…"How many GKLS employees does it take to center a mouse on a mouse pad?"