



THIS IS HOW PEOPLE WHO ARE HIDING THINGS ACT

In hindsight, maybe I shouldn't have called the man a rent-a-cop. But he was being a real jerk. Here's what happened.

Colleague Charu Gupta and I arrived at the Cuyahoga County administration building around 3 p.m. this past Monday to ask acting County Recorder Thomas Roche some tough questions about his predecessor, Pat O'Malley, who resigned last week and who apparently has a penchant for porn. Anyway, we wanted to find out why several computer hard drives were suddenly replaced in the Recorder's offices shortly before O'Malley's departure ("[Oh, Malley!](#)", May 21).

Roche is a wiry little man with gray hair and a forehead so furrowed he could hide conveyances in it. He told us that he would get to our public records requests when he felt like it, that he was specifically not going to release the information we asked for before our deadline, because, "I choose not to." (Someone's been reading *Bartleby, the Scrivener*.) And with that, he opened the door to the second floor lobby. When we went through, he remained inside and talked to another man in his office, dressed in a ridiculous plaid button-up short sleeve shirt. Then, Roche took the elevator to another floor while his toadie went over to the security guards. Then he and the three guards approached us and informed us that we were being escorted out of the building — a public building, mind you — because we supposedly didn't "have business" there. They refused to define "business."

We rode the elevators down to the first floor, and the guards guided us toward the exit. Charu asked how long we were supposed to be banned from the building — we had more documents to get from the Auditor's office for one thing, and for another, kicking reporters out of public buildings is just not cool — but they wouldn't answer. Then "Officer" Rookard, as he called himself, actually grabbed my shoulders and shoved me out the front doors and down the steps. He was sure to cover his ass, though, by threatening me. "You pushed me," he said. Never happened. I'm 5-foot-10, 175 pounds sopping wet; Rookard is several stones heavier. I gestured toward Charu and said it was good that I had a witness. "I've got three," he said, smiling, and pointing to his fellow guards.

Yes. This actually happened.

Rookard's superior was called, but he wasn't much help either. "Who do you work for, anyway," I asked. "Are you employed by the Sheriff's Office?" No, they said. "Are you part of the Cleveland Police Department?" Nope, not with them, either. Rookard informed me that the guards are contracted privately by the county commissioners. "Oh, so you're rent-a-cops." I said.

Yeah, not good. Apparently that's like calling a psychologist a shrink — that is, if psychology didn't require some training. "I've got names for you, too, junior," said Rookard's superior, "Sergeant" Kelly Purcell. Really? A guy named Kelly has a name for me? Still, we were at an impasse (look it up, Kelly), so Charu and I left.

Later that day, County Administrator Dennis Madden conceded that the guards were wrong to throw us out of the building. He indicated, however, that he was told the reason we were evicted was that we were trying to talk to employees while they were working. That is not true, nor did Roche's aide or the guards say anything about that at the time.

For what it's worth, we're allowed back in. And we will return. There's nothing like watching public officials make fools of themselves. — *James Renner*