It's 1997 And Who Needs My Protection?

For 28 years I had worked for Unisys, a similar sized company to NCR in the same industry. From being a humble engineering trainee in 1967, through roles in engineering management, salesman, sales management and Europe-Africa Division marketing manager, I had seen Unisys financial controls closely. Even the most basic expense forms were checked and rejected if not backed up by correct receipts or invoices. Program budgets were monitored closely for adherence to planned budget forecasts. Financial controls were always tight.

How could I have possibly known that Buchanan had access to funds within NCR for which there were no financial controls whatsoever? How could I have possibly known that Buchanan had access to (what turned out to be) enormous amounts of NCR funds, without anyone else at NCR being aware?

It came to light in statements by NCR to the criminal court in 2004 that the financial controls in NCR Belgium were, to all intents and purposes, non-existent. Prior to the inveiglement many studies had been undertaken by external auditors that highlighted the issues with the financial controls to NCR, however NCR took no action to rectify the situation. Surely a company has a responsibility to conduct their financial affairs competently.

I had been working for some years on NCR/UPU/PSL projects and a number of Postmaster Generals in the developing world had put their trust in me to modernise their Postal Administrations; they had invested their hard-earned funds in me and my vision. I was the one sitting on the other side of the table representing NCR, the UPU and PSL when the contracts for modernisation were signed. I was the one that was being trusted by Mr Suleman Msofe, Postmaster General of Tanzania Post; I was the one being trusted by Mr Cleveland Critchlow, Postmaster General of Bermuda Post; and more.

Both Tanzania Post and Uganda Post had mortgaged their postal headquarters in order to raise the funds for the project. I could and would do nothing that would break the trust that I had been honoured with. I felt a moral responsibility to protect my customers.

So, do I reveal to NCR what was happening with the potential risk that NCR would cancel the Consultant's Agreement and stop the formal funding for PSL with the potentially devastating impact on my customers, or, do I continue to build PSL with the determination to repay NCR for any losses through the success of the program? This gave me so many, many sleepless nights. Of course it would not be illegal to desert my customers but it would cost them dear. This was a decision that I had to take and I found it simply impossible to put my customers at risk. Of course had I known how much

money would ultimately be involved then I would have certainly found a different way forward, but the inveiglement was creeping.

Of course, had Buchanan told me that he could steal the money and that I could be involved and take my share, then I would have sent him packing. Instead of admitting his plans to me, he deceived me with stories of using the money for NCR/PSL future benefit and gradually inveigled me into his activities.

Throughout this whole period of the inveiglement, I could have taken whatever funds I liked from PCSL. Indeed, I was continually encouraged by Buchanan to do so. I could have completely resolved any further financial problems I had; I could have paid off my mortgage; I could have absolutely secured my future; I could have taken funds during this time directly into PSL so that I could secure the future of PSL. But I didn't. Once I had accepted that the funds were being used for illegal purposes, I didn't want to touch them in any way for my personal benefit.

Much later when I was interviewed by D/C Steve Ball of the fraud squad, he asked my why I hadn't taken any of the money. I simply told him that it wasn't my money. He seemed taken aback by my honesty.

I had a moral responsibility not to break the trust put in me by my customers. Unwillingly caught up in the nightmare caused by the incompetence of NCR and the greed and manipulation of Buchanan, I had little option but to break the law.

I had to ask myself the question, "Who deserves more protection, NCR, who are so disorganised and incompetent as to lose $1,000,000 in the first place, or my customers in the developing world, who had invested their hard-earned funds in these critical projects?" I'm sure that the majority of our customers had never had a bank account with as much as $1,000,000, let alone lose one and not even miss it.

The answer was always that I must protect my customers.