

A case for nuking the office microwave

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Sitting beside the office kitchen puts you in the path of wafting odours and constant chit-chat.

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I used to sit at the worst desk in the newsroom.

Originally, I thought the desk I had before that was the worst because it was right by the bridge: journalist speak for mission control. This is where chaos is born. Phones are ringing. Scanners are blaring. Reporters are trekking past with questions (a.k.a. complaints) about their assignments.

One day, I eyed an empty desk across the room and hustled to establish squatter's rights. I

could not for the life of me understand why someone hadn't already snagged this sweet spot.

By lunchtime the next day, I had my answer. In my haste to escape the hubbub, I neglected to notice one major flaw: my new desk was right by the office kitchen. By "kitchen" I mean fridge, water dispenser and not one but two microwaves. And I wondered why it took me so long to get pregnant.

Some of you will be shaking an irradiated head in sympathy. The rest of you can think of it this way: take however many office mates you have, multiply that number by two and a half to three minutes on high and that's how many inane conversations the office microwave troll has every day at every feeding time.

"How's it going, Alison?" asks random colleague, fingers tapping on the counter. "I'm just making my lunch. I'm having fish. Hope it doesn't smell too bad." Right. Because somehow, somewhere, someone developed a way to make leftover fish not smell. The only thing worse is the sticky, incorrigible nature of burnt microwave popcorn lingering over my afternoon.

Along with the microwave banter came interrogations about the random food that magically appeared on the counter. "Where did these cupcakes/cookies/brownies come from? How long have they been here? Do they have nuts?" The answers never seemed to change the outcome. The food was always consumed, as is wont to happen with worker bees around treats.

I no longer sit next to that appliance, but the memories remain strong. So, too, does my lunchbox paranoia. Very rarely do I opt for leftovers as they require heat. Heat takes time, spawns idle chatter and lets everyone know (and hate) what you had for dinner last night.

When I feel brave, I'll bring one of those little cans of tuna. But I'll also bring an extra container for transporting the odour-laden tin back home to avoid tendrils of fish oil wafting from the office's recycling bin.

This strange fear of olfactory offences, combined with intense frugality and an aversion to sandwiches, has left me with few noon-hour options. So every day this miserly brown bagger transports a massively unladylike salad to work. Others glide past me with lunch sacks the size of my wallet as I try to avoid Kerrigan-ing someone with my anvil-sized container of mixed baby greens—it takes an awful lot of roughage to keep a body full all afternoon, you know.

I've been doing this for so long now, I've developed a sort of salad-based Stockholm syndrome; I can't go more than a day without one. Not a bad problem to have, I suppose. Most nutritionists would approve. And at the very least I know that when I walk away from the office lunch spot, I'm not going to be the one cursed for leaving the memory of a pungent curry, steamed cauliflower or seafood pasta in my wake.