

BY STEVE YOUNG

# YOU HAVE ONE NEW VOICEMAIL

*Each time you don't answer my call, you're one step closer to the abyss.*

Hello. We've been trying to reach you regarding your vehicle's extended warranty. Since we haven't gotten a response, we're giving you a final courtesy call before we close out your file.

It's a sad thing to close out a file. I work at a little Mom-and-Pop extended warranty company, very old school, and we don't have computer files that can just be deleted with a click. We still use manila folders. Your name is written on one in black Sharpie. If we close out your file, we'll turn the folder inside out and write someone else's name on the other side of the tab. But we'll always know your name is still there, and occasionally we'll look at the side with your name and sigh, thinking about what might have been with you and your vehicle's warranty coverage.

Actually, I see that the folder containing your file has already been turned inside out. There's an older name on the other side of the tab: "Jeff Glaspin." Ah yes. That one was a heartbreaker. Mom and Pop and I tried to get in touch with Jeff numerous times about his extended vehicle warranty. Eventually Pop said it was time to give up on Jeff and reuse the file folder. I held out for as long as I could. I even made additional calls to Jeff on my own time, but I never reached him. With great reluctance and sorrow I closed out his file.

Recalling this dark episode prompted me to Google Jeff just now. Oh my God. There are several news stories about how his vehicle ended up needing expensive repairs, and how he had to pay out-of-pocket. Apparently this put quite a dent in his finances and contributed to his downward spiral which culminated in—well, it's a sordid story.

Press 1 to hear the wrenching details of what happened to Jeff Glaspin.

I know I shouldn't blame myself. But I guess I'll always wonder if I could have done more. One further call might have gotten through to him and changed everything. But there are so many files here at the office. So many calls to make. So many lengthy voicemails to leave. Between the crushing workload and the guilt, I don't sleep much.

If someday I were to learn that your vehicle needed expensive repairs which you had to pay for yourself, I don't know if I could handle it. I'd be in a constant state of dread, fearing another Glaspin fiasco.

But this isn't about me. Please don't worry about me. Right

now we need to focus on you.

At this point I'm thinking you might be better off selling your current vehicle and buying a new one with a fresh factory warranty that will give you peace of mind for a good long while. I know that wouldn't benefit my company, but honestly, I didn't get into this business for the money, and neither did my parents.

But you know what, no, I don't want you to buy a new vehicle. That's the coward's way out. You're better than that. There's actually a handwritten note in your file—put there by Mom or Pop, I forget which—that says "Excellent person. Sure to do the right thing—when given proper encouragement."

Jeff Glaspin's file never contained a note like that. Maybe somehow he sensed that we expected less of him, and it gnawed at him. Maybe that's why he never picked up when I called. He couldn't face the truth about himself, or his vehicle's warranty status.

I guess it was like a Greek tragedy. For Jeff, the ending had been pre-ordained long before, by his weakness and stubbornness and the inexorable aging of his vehicle. But you, a stronger, wiser, better person, still have free will. You still have the chance to create a happy ending for this story—but the window is closing. Your vehicle isn't as new as it used to be. Each time you don't answer my call, you're one step closer to the abyss.

Press 2 to speak to a warranty specialist. Press 3 to learn more about the abyss.

Mom's pointing at the big stack of files I still have to get to today. I should go—but I'm glad I got this off my chest. I know it's a lot to think about, between your vehicle's future repairs, my own troubles, and the chilling example of the late Mr. Glaspin. If I've overburdened you, I apologize.

Press 4 to place your number on our do-not-call list.

That would disappoint me, but I'd understand. Though, full disclosure, even then I don't know if I'd be able to suddenly give up, just like that. This is too important, and I suppose the psychologists would say we need closure.

So yeah, you'll probably hear from me again, one last courtesy call before we close out your file.

If you're there and still listening, pick up. Please.

Press 5 to hear me weeping. **B**

## STEVE YOUNG

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