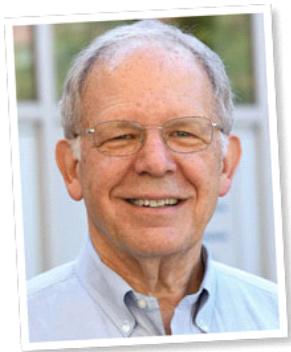


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Evil Succeeds If Enough Good People Do Nothing

Bill McCurry



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The scene is a 50-plus-year-old California garden center where a midnight shopper had helped himself to thousands of dollars of merchandise, repeatedly.

"We don't have to be helpless victims," said Michael Sullivan, operations manager of Roger's Gardens in Corona Del Mar, California.

Roger's had over 100 security cameras covering their 7 acres. The front of the store is merchandised to create an inviting and aspirational welcome. The thief would park his truck outside of camera range, hiding his face as he "shopped." Their existing cameras couldn't identify license plates at night.

Jewelry stores move high-value products nightly into secure vaults. Michael couldn't see abandoning the team's effective displays or moving large trees, operating fountains and mature bushes at closing.

After three midnight visits, Michael placed Apple Air Tags inside pots similar to those stolen. On the thief's fourth visit, Apple reported to Michael's phone that one tag had moved. He texted the identified location to the detective who immediately responded and took videos outside the identified address.

"What here could be your stuff?" they asked Michael, showing him the films.

"All of it," he replied.

The resident was arrested. The police asked Michael to identify and inventory his missing merchandise. The ill-gotten loot—valued at over \$8,000—included trees, exotic plants, prized bushes, concrete fountains and an \$800 teak bench.

Michael has developed a good relationship with the Newport Beach Police Department (Roger's is in their jurisdiction), benefiting both Roger's and the officers who lock up crooks.

"We're on the same team and want everyone to know we're doing whatever necessary to be mutually successful in reducing crime," said Michael.

Roger's is hosting an open house at the garden center for the community to meet and interact with local officers. They had an officer address an all-hands staff meeting about shoplifting and safety.

Roger's policy is that no merchandise is worth anyone being injured. They are very careful. Most employees have walkie-talkies and a code word that's used over the air when shoplifting is suspected. Only trained managers respond to these calls. With the cameras constantly recording, Roger's informs the police who follow up immediately. Local patrol officers and detectives are always accommodating.

One suspect was seen loading things into her car. The police traced the license plate to a nice home in Beverly Hills where they recovered the merchandise and arrested the suspect.

Michael said they prosecute any amount despite news that California doesn't prosecute low-level shoplifters. Shoplifting is a crime. In California, theft above \$950 is a felony. Keeping the detectives informed solidifies relationships, which builds trust around a common goal of incarcerating the perpetrators.

The nighttime serial thief was featured on the Newport Beach Police Department's Instagram, generating over 1,000 likes for his arrest. Michael's story was picked up by national television, which broadcast him explaining what happened and earning him 15 minutes of fame. Customers and total strangers have come up to him asking to shake his hand, congratulating him for capturing the bad guy.

In 1970, Gavin Herbert, Sr. purchased Roger's, eventually turning it over to his son, Gavin Herbert, Jr. Now 92, Senior keeps his office at the garden center and is frequently on site. Both father and son support the team's effort to eliminate shrinkage. Their investment in cameras and systems has dramatically reduced mysterious, unsolved disappearances of merchandise. Since the serial night thefts, they've upgraded their parking lot cameras to Reconyx infrared models, ensuring license plate capture.

Rather than curse the darkness, Michael, the Herberts and the Newport Beach Police Department turned a spotlight on retail thieves. A shoutout to these good people. **GP**

Bill would love to hear from you with questions, comments or ideas for future columns. Please contact him at wmccurry@mccurryassoc.com or (609) 731-8389.