

Indentured Servitude

By Reg P. Wydeven
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I recently caught the action flick ‘The Bourne Legacy’ on cable. The movie is a sequel to the Bourne trilogy starring Matt Damon as Jason Bourne. This installment coincides with the events of ‘The Bourne Ultimatum,’ where Bourne blows the whistle on illegal black ops run by the CIA.

In the latest installment of the franchise, Jeremy Renner plays Aaron Cross, a brainwashed super soldier, much like Bourne. After Bourne exposes the CIA, the agency shuts down all its clandestine operations and kills their operatives. Using a bug implanted under Cross’ skin, the CIA tracks him to Alaska, where they dispatch a drone to kill him with a missile. Because he is trained too well, Cross is able to remove his implant and put it in a wolf. When the CIA instead blows up the wolf and the bug stops transmitting, the agency mistakenly believes they killed Cross.

If it weren’t for Cross’ quick thinking, the CIA would have succeeded in their mission due to their high tech bug that tracked Cross’ whereabouts around the globe. But then, of course, it would have been a very short, boring movie.

As life often imitates art, many employers are taking a cue from the CIA by tracking their employees’ movements.

Myrna Arias is one of those employees. Feeling her privacy was being invaded, Arias sued her employer, Intermex, a money transfer service, after she removed an app on her phone that tracked her movements.

According to the suit, California-based Intermex asked their employees to download an app from a company called Xora to work-issued iPhones. The company explained that it was using Xora to monitor their movements via the GPS system in their phones to see whether it made sense to invest in company cars. Employees were issued phones so they could take client calls even after work.

However, when Arias asked if Intermex planned to track employees outside of work hours, her boss allegedly “admitted that employees would be monitored while off duty and bragged that he knew how fast she was driving at specific moments ever since she had installed the app on her phone.” In her suit, Arias claims she understood using the GPS function during work hours, but objected to using it to track her location after-hours.

Arias allegedly told her boss that Xora was akin to “a prisoner’s ankle bracelet” and felt it was an invasion of her privacy. When Arias removed the app from her phone due to her privacy concerns, she was purportedly reprimanded. She was then fired the following month.

Intermex is apparently not alone. According to Bloomberg News, more than 20 companies currently sell software tools used to analyze and monitor employee behavior. The software is typically designed to detect hackers and corporate espionage. Several states have outlawed the use of mobile tracking devices to monitor other individuals, and more states are considering such measures.

And if there’s anything the Bourne movies have taught me, it’s that tracking employees’ movements never seems to turn out so well for the employer.