

## ***In My Opinion...***

### **Dean Says:**



Charlene Kidder

## ***Taking the Trouble to Troubleshoot***

Nearly 40 years ago, when main-frame computer systems began to appear in more and more businesses, I met a technician from IBM by the name of Bob Anderson. Over time, he became a friend. Once in a while, when we were together for some social occasion, he would get a service call and ask me if I wanted to tag along. I eagerly went with him to see these new monstrosities that had overtaken the business world.

During these visits, I observed the great skill and care with which Bob approached his work. Through this experience, I began to understand what kind of wisdom, knowledge, and understanding it took to become a really effective technician.

First of all, Bob maintained a very thorough and well-organized set of documentation for all the equipment he had to service. He had several portable file boxes in the trunk of his vehicle. In each box, he had all the technical and service manuals for the equipment. As he received service bulletins, he would carefully file those in an easy-to-retrieve folder in the appropriate file box. And,

he would annotate the master documentation with the date and bulletin number of the pertinent service bulletin. Sometimes, he would write a phrase or two in the main manual that would aid him in recalling the nature of the related service bulletin.

Secondly, he kept a very thoughtfully organized set of spare parts. He continually learned what parts had a greater likelihood of failure. He always kept enough of those parts on hand so he could get his customer's equipment up and running quickly.

Thirdly, he always listened very carefully to the explanation he received from the computer operator. As the operator described the nature of a particular problem, Bob would ask very thoughtful questions. I soon realized that his questions formed the basis for his troubleshooting. Instead of diving right into the physical aspect of troubleshooting, Bob let his mind lead the way. By eliciting quite detailed explanations from the computer operator, Bob narrowed the field of where his hands-on troubleshooting would begin.

Fourthly, Bob approached every troubleshooting experience with an open mind. Even though he became well versed in all the foibles of the equipment he serviced, he never brought his past prejudices to bear on a new problem. Instead, he approached each trouble call as if it presented a totally new set of circumstances. Only after he had proceeded thoroughly, always following a

pristine approach, did he allow his experience to validate his conclusion.

By repeating this pattern at trouble call after trouble call, Bob earned the reputation as the very best technician that IBM had in the area. Not only did he keep his customers happy with the IBM product line, his attention to detail and his willingness to carefully and thoroughly troubleshoot every problem gave customers the confidence to keep their business with IBM.

With each new product line, Bob followed the same process he had developed early in his career. In fact, when the need to maintain proper documentation began to crowd out the trunk of his vehicle, Bob reorganized to give himself more storage room for his ever-growing number of file boxes.

In addition, whenever IBM offered volunteer training opportunities, Bob signed up for the class. Over his lifetime at IBM, Bob counted that he had attended nearly 500 classes on various hardware and software. And, he had volunteered for well over half of those classes. By greatly exceeding the mandatory classes, Bob became extremely knowledgeable in every aspect of the IBM product line that he might possibly encounter at his customers. He became a valuable resource that his customers relied upon to keep the work flowing in their computer rooms.

How does this apply to the world of fire alarm systems? Ask yourself whether the technicians you encounter have taken similar steps to advance their value. Do they maintain proper documentation? Do they keep appropriate spare parts on hand? Do they listen effectively to the customer's description of the problem? Do they troubleshoot with an open mind? And, do they take every available opportunity to get the training they need to do their jobs well?

The overall reliability and dependability of fire alarm systems depends significantly on the manner in which technicians test and maintain those systems. Taking the trouble to troubleshoot goes a long way toward assuring a fire alarm system will function properly when called upon to do so. □

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