



Self-Possessed

Our contest inviting readers to play Dave Barry for a day was a huge hit. We received more than 600 submissions. A bunch of you made us laugh, a smaller group left us puzzled, and a few, well, don't quit your day jobs. In the end, E. B. Lande of Lexington gave us the biggest chuckle. Congratulations! Next week, we launch a new column in this space that is all about relationships, from the dating world to married life. — The Editors

One of the problems with being an entrepreneur (that's French for "I work in my pajamas") is not having a technical-support department that can interpret my screams from a distance. This means there's no one to talk to when my computer announces that a "permanent fatal error" is taking place.

I don't know about you, but this gives me the creeps. Who thinks up this stuff? "Permanent" and "fatal," when used in the same sentence, could prompt an immediate call to 911. But that was when words actually meant something. Now it just means you press "control-alt-delete." And what exactly does "alt" mean? "Halt," in a French accent? "Alternative"? (Do I have one?) "Altitude"? (If I drop the computer from a great height, will I feel better?)

Come to think of it, "delete" is no trivial concept, either. If I delete the permanent fatal error, does that make it go away? And can I carry this concept over to the rest of my life, please? When I was gainfully employed, I could call tech support and say, "You won't believe this, but . . ."

1. My monitor is on fire.
2. My C drive is masquerading as my D drive.
3. My speakers are playing music from *The Exorcist*.
4. My printer has devoured a stack of envelopes that were on the other side of the desk (I swear).

Dead silence on the other end of the phone. Big sigh. I could hear the eyes rolling. "Well, I'll get over there when I can."

But after weeks of my unique electromagnetic field running amok among previously well-behaved (yeah, right) computers, the tech-support guys knew enough to skip the pleasantries, and they would all come running (have you ever seen tech-support guys run?) to stare cautiously over my shoulder. There would be quite a crowd in my cubicle. I am Exhibit A of computer idiocy. A long and very quiet pause, then: "How did you do that?" (Well, if I knew how I did it, I'd be halfway to fixing it, wouldn't I?)

Two days later, I have a new computer that is not possessed by evil spirits. However, their relatives manage to track me down within a week. As with relatives everywhere, they hang around and *do not leave*. I have temper tantrums and threaten defenestration, but they are unmoved. The tech-support guys and I see a lot of one another. We become sort of a reverse harem. They are mine; all mine. I buy them things and take them out to dinner.

So, now that I am self-employed, why should I be surprised that poltergeists have followed me to frolic in my hard drive while I wait for toll-free tech-support somewhere on

the other side of the world to pronounce my name correctly? While I wish these countries all the best in their exuberant determination to become us, they have a long way to go in the "let's get snappy here and fix this immediately" department. The outsourced tech-support conversation goes something like this:

Q. And what is your name, please?

A. Ellen.

Q. Excuse me, please?

A. Ellen. E-L-L-E-N.

Q. OK, Ellen. What seems to be the problem?

A. Ohmygod, where do I start? It keeps crashing.

Q. What does? Could I ask you to hold, please?

(Hold, hold, hold — I'm still holding, and my computer is having an asthma attack.)

Q. Thank you so much for holding. And what is your name, please?

A. My name is furious. F-U-R, etc.

The solution, I'm afraid, is for me to become my own tech-support department. I told this to one of the support guys I used to work with who still talked to me, but he has since disconnected his phone and left no forwarding number. Plan B is to train someone in my household as backup support. Let's see — the cat is already possessed, and the dog only works for treats. Ditto husband and kids.

And Plan C is to move somewhere where technology has yet to be invented. Any suggestions? **BG**

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