

The Universe is Backward—Compliant

Something I once posted to a listserv in a fit of agony

Murphy's Law Corollaries

Corollary 1

- a) If you throw away the cardboard box right after you install that new equipment, you'll soon find that the unit is inappropriate for your needs and must be returned for credit. Without the box, it can't be returned for credit. Management thinks you are an idiot.
- b) If you save the box for a year, the unit will work fine, with no glitches. Management thinks you are an idiot for keeping all those boxes for a year.

Corollary 2

- a) If you tighten each of 37 screws on an access panel as you insert each one, you'll find, at screw #35, that you must loosen screws 1 through 34 in order to get screws 35, 36 and 37 into the panel.
- b) If you put all the screws in half-way, then you just need to go around a second time and tighten all of them — about 30% less work than (2a).

Corollary 3

- a) If you order your digital remote program circuit with a due date of one day before you need it,
1) telco won't make the due date, and you'll miss the remote broadcast, or
2) the program circuit will have a provisioning error and won't work with your codec and you'll miss the remote broadcast.
- b) If you order your remote program circuit with a due date of a week before you need it, and go out with the equipment 5 days in advance (because telco didn't make the due date), it will work fine every time. However, it will still not work on the day of the remote, because somebody kicked a wire loose in the telephone closet the afternoon before, while installing a new phone in another office in the same building.
- c) If you go out again the day before the remote broadcast, early enough in the day that telco can get a repair person out to fix a problem like (3-b), you'll never have a problem like (3-b). Ever.

Summary

The problem with Murphy's Law is a murky understanding of the mechanisms at work. The equipment is aware, and the universe is backward compliant. We control the actions of those who have already acted by our own actions after the fact. The act of testing the circuit 5 days in advance ensures that the telco techs will set all the dipswitches and program all the options correctly a week earlier. Time is an illusion.

The idea is that we must show the universe that we give a damn by actually putting enough effort into things to make sure they work. The universe is cruel, and enjoys our frustration. It is just as frustrating to do all the extra work and never have it be necessary as it is to not do all the extra work and have things go wrong. The only difference is that doing the extra work gets the job done.

70-hour weeks, anyone?

Why did I compose this diatribe? After 30 years doing radio engineering, example (1-a) just got me yesterday. . . As Todd sang, "Don't you every listen . . . don't you ever learn?!"

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