

By Jack Wallen

As a member of a local consultancy firm, my primary jobs are remote support and backups. Because of this, I deal directly with our clients a lot. Although I am fond of many of those clients, most of them still display behaviors that drive me, as a consultant, crazy. And maybe it's the excessive rain and storms we've been having, but these behaviors have escalated lately. So I thought I would share some of these things with you to see whether you've run into them -- and whether you've encountered other behaviors you want to share with your fellow readers.

Please understand, I do this to lay down a bit of humor so we can all commiserate, cope, and (I hope) laugh at the follies we deal with day in and day out. I do not, in any way, mean to suggest that I think people are horrible or that I don't like to deal with them.

1: Take control of remote sessions

I do a lot of remote support. For that support, I use either LogMeIn or TeamViewer. Inevitably, I run into clients who constantly want to "show me" what's going on, take over the mouse to point out something different, or even use their machine for something else (like replying to an email that should be able to wait). Outside of annoying any support tech, this does one thing -- extends the length of time needed to do a job.

Sometimes, it seems clients don't realize that other clients are actually waiting for my help, so they think they can take up as much of my time as they want. But beyond taking up time, this type of behavior often can lead to an environment of mistrust, where techs feel the client does not trust their work. No one wants to work under these circumstances.

2: Give too much irrelevant information about an issue

What I really want to know is that you clicked on an attachment that was in an email. I don't care to know the email was originated by your grandmother on your father's side and the email had the most darling picture of kittens and puppies playing together in a field of daisies. I also don't care that you were sitting at your desk, having your usual lunch of yogurt and sliced apples dipped in caramel when everything started to go down the drain. Get to the point, give me the facts, and I will do my job to the best of my ability.

3: Blame the issue on something I (or another tech) did previously

Yes, I've worked on your machine before. No, what I did last time to help you remap your K drive had zero effect on the fact that now you can't get a network connection. Although they may be related, they are not directly cause and effect. Trust me on this. I'm not trying to pull a fast one on you, and I am 100 percent sure that the K drive issue is not related. But on the off chance that you simply will not believe me, I will do everything I can to show you the two are not related in any way. If you still don't believe me, I have a list of other consultants who will be happy to have your work -- until they're no longer happy to have your work.

4: Lie

This one should not need any explanation. But for those who have yet to experience the liar, let me set the stage. There are times when you log into a user's machine and discover that something obviously has been done -- a profile or program deleted -- that can be done only by an end user. When an end user has made such a mistake, he or she will sometimes try to deny doing anything to cause the problem. That's fine. But most support professionals can see through the thinly veiled lie. We know the truth... so it's okay to admit it.

5: Take control of conversations

When I'm trying to explain an issue to an end user, it really bugs me when that user takes over the conversation, preventing me from being able to effectively communicate either the problem or the solution. Generally, these people tend to have more to say on the issue than necessary and assume what they have to add to the situation is far more important than what they have to learn. If those end users would stop and listen for once, the reoccurring issue I am trying to help them with might not reoccur.

6: Ask the "quick question"

This one really bothers me. Without fail, a client will call me with a "quick question" that inevitably winds up being a 30-minute phone conversation. My time is valuable through the workday and those quick questions add up. Not only that, but many clients use the quick question to avoid having to pay for support on the real issue.

7: Chat while I'm concentrating

This goes along with dominating the conversation. Many users, while in the middle of a remote session, want to chat. Sometimes that's okay, as we are simply waiting for a download or waiting on the progress of a service or application. But when I'm elbows deep in the dirt and grit of trying to resolve a crucial issue, don't try to chat me up about the weather, the royal wedding, or the price of gas. Please let me resolve the issue at hand (especially one that requires my concentration) and then I will happily chat about whatever (so long as I don't have a pressing appointment after yours).

8: Insist what their "cousin" told them was true

I get it. Some companies enlist the help of "Cousin Joe," who happens to owe the secretary a favor and "knows a thing or two" about computers. Well, Cousin Joe didn't do you any favors when he caused even more problems doing what he did. Not that I am going to slam your cousin. But when I say that although Joe's intentions were good, what he did was counterproductive to solving the issue at hand, please don't insist that the cousin was in the right and that I am only trying to bilk you out of more money. Of course, if it ever comes to those kinds of words, you will most certainly be looking for a new support specialist.

9: Undo my work

Raise your hand if you're guilty of undoing all that work the support techs did the very second they left. I've seen this happen plenty of times. I've had clients actually confess to doing this. What those clients don't realize is that I will more than likely have to come back and redo what I did prior to this visit -- and I'll also have to fix problems they caused by undoing my work. Do us both a favor and don't undo my work. This is rarely going to be a smart choice, and the possibility that you'll be able to resolve the issues created by your tampering are nil.

10: Not have the necessary information

When end users call for help, 75 percent of the time they have all of the information necessary for a successful appointment. The other 25 percent? Not so much. In fact, a large portion of that 25 percent require nearly double the normal time needed just for fact gathering. So... when you call, please make sure you have all the information needed to complete the appointment. Otherwise, you are wasting my time and running up your bill.

Do these users sound like some of your clients? If not, you are one lucky consultant/support specialist. If these clients do sound familiar, you have my sympathy. And if you are guilty of the above, don't take this so much as a criticism, but as a way to help you get the most out of your tech support.