

CAUTION: READ INSTRUCTIONS!!

My hope is to improve my machine by upgrading, which is done by adding this small device. The instructions say, "Caution-- Read Instructions before Proceeding." I've had trouble with that a few times. I sometimes set aside the printed instructions that tell me how to assemble or use something new, and I begin assembling or using and trust my ability to figure out what to do as I do it.

My reading on the subject tells me this is a male malady common to our culture. Writers on the subject say that men often ignore instructions and try to figure out how to do something to prove their intelligence or to find a better way than the way described in the instructions, which maybe is also an attempt to show superior intelligence.

Sometimes, that works out just fine and actually does prove a basic level of intelligence. Not very often, at my house.

Sometimes I find myself in a mess and only then dig through boxes, packing materials, enclosed warranties and invoices, and find printed instructions in large, dark letters, "DO NOT ATTEMPT STEP 3 UNTIL YOU HAVE COMPLETED STEP TWO BY DISCONNECTING..."

Oh. Hmmm. That's why the huge spark and subsequent explosion. I thought the red cable would... but apparently not. I wonder if the warranty might... Hmmm. No, it says here in extra large lettering, "THIS WARRANTY DOES NOT EVER, NO MATTER WHAT....." So it looks like they've had this problem before, people jump in and figure it out as they go and miss the obvious step, "before applying power, to avoid huge sparks and subsequent explosions, first disconnect..."

Yes, well, it also says, "Liability limitations. In case of injury..." So apparently, my situation could have been worse.

Now I approach it again and attempt to follow directions, and I understand more clearly what has happened here. I am influenced by the male tendency to forge ahead without any instructions, but also a long time ago, I began to rebel against written instructions, because they are so often written by engineers who use English as a second language. Sometimes this means they speak Korean and don't have a firm grasp on English.

I am not making a derogatory statement, nor am I drawing derogatory conclusions. I speak no Korean at all, in fact, no

foreign language. English is it so far for me, and I'm far enough along on the path of life that it isn't likely I will learn a second language, so I realize the engineers' accomplishment with language exceeds mine, but the company they work for does need to hire someone who speaks English fluently to make sure the necessary information is communicated well enough that I can use what that company manufactures.

Often, the problem is that the engineer does speak adequate English but has become lost in arcane knowledge and has forgotten how to communicate about something she or he understands but few others do. This problem has become much worse with the advent of more and more complex electronic machines and the various operating systems and software needed to run those machines.

A clearly written, easy to understand instruction manual is rare and a treasure, as is anyone who understands a machine and the complex systems required to make it operate usefully and understands how to communicate about the complexities well enough that one who is at first ignorant can understand how to bring the complex systems under control in a way that allows efficient work toward a particular goal.

I have known a few people who could explain well a complex technological process.

J.R. was an employee at a computer sales and service business. He sat me down on a stool beside him and went through the operation of a computer program step by step, until I understood how to operate the program I had been unable to decipher because I didn't have a clearly-written operator's manual. I relied on him to guide me through several new programs during my first two years of computer operations.

J.R. is a gifted individual. As he learned more and more complex machines and systems of operation, he never forgot how to communicate from the very beginning to an individual who was totally ignorant about the machine and its operation.

J.R. moved on to other places, other jobs. So did I.

The manual I have for this addition to my machine is not clearly planned and written. I checked the bookstore earlier today. There are 21 books on how to do what I need to do. I don't want to examine each of the 21 and try to decide which, if any, will guide me clearly. It would take several days to explore all the books, and I might not find one that tells me what I need to know.

It uses less time to try to figure it out myself. This hole in the connector on this cable appears to match this hook up and this bolt, and it makes sense that it would be hooked up this way, and the manual might support this procedure. I examine

the manual carefully. Maybe after the huge spark and subsequent explosion, I can avoid further problems by reading carefully.

Even when I read carefully, I find it very hard to tell if the manual means do it this way or rather, something else entirely, possibly even a different cable. But I'll try it. I smell burning insulation, and I quickly unplug everything, then stand guard with a fire extinguisher until I'm sure no flame will develop.

But I have several writing projects to finish.

Ah, I can do without a computer at all, I realize when I stop to think about it. We dealt with basic writing and images for millennia before complex machines came along. What I'll need is a hard, sharp tool and a large rock. If I can't move the rock once I've inscribed the text and image, then readers can come to the rock.

We've done it this way for thousands of years. Why should I throw away effective methods in favor of large sparks, burning insulation, and days wasted trying to figure out machinery when all I really need is a way to write down what I'm ready to write down?

When I locate an appropriate rock in an ideal place and chisel what I have to say on the rock, I'll notify readers where it is, and all who are interested can come to the rock and read what I have chiseled.