

The best of *Bon Journal*

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Volume 1 Issue 4: It's not a perfect world after all

For those of us accustomed to perfectionism, it's not a perfect world, especially for the time-challenged damsel in distress.

Distressed!

I fumbled for my wallet in the black cab. The driver waited impatiently until I asked him to turn the engine off as I was having trouble. Finally, I exclaimed that I had lost my wallet. Either take my one pound coin or accept a personal cheque for the fare.

It's 1 am. I'm tired. What should I do? Who could I call at this late hour? Did I leave it on the train? Did I leave it in the Persian restaurant? In the office?

I picked up the phone in a panic. The beeping noise indicated there was a message for me. It was from the security guard at London Business School. Apparently, someone had found my wallet. I couldn't believe my luck. I called and thanked the officer for not only bothering to locate my phone number but also to call me so that I wouldn't have to worry.

Imagine what would have happened? I would have cancelled all my credit cards - and not slept for hours.

Thrice locked out

When I first realised that my house keys were inside the empty suitcase I lent to Hari, whose own suitcase zipper had busted during flight, I felt a dizzy sensation. How would I get back home? No worries. I'll just call my builder to make sure he's working the day I return.

Once home, I declined to take my spare set of keys from him. No, keep it until you return to finish the job, I will use the other set.

Next morning, as soon as I shut the door and tried to use the deadlock key, I realised that I had picked up the wrong set of keys. They were my neighbour's keys. Luckily my neighbour was home that evening when I returned. So I took back the

set I had left with him for emergencies.

This morning I learned that the deadlock key I had tried to use yesterday morning was a duplicate of the neighbour's own house keys. Instead of checking whether the other key was a duplicate also, I took off the deadlock key and returned it to my neighbour. Then I swapped keys for key rings without checking if I had the right keys.

But the keys I took did not fit my keyhole! I had two spare sets of my neighbour's house keys, and none of my own to begin with! In the process of swapping the spare set I retrieved from my neighbour, I had taken the spare set for his house!

Don't panic now, I told myself. There's still another back-up. Just check my other neighbour for my other spare set. No one answered the door. Could she be out of town or asleep? By now, it was 11:30 pm and way past her bedtime. I started to panic. Just then, her next door neighbour came to the rescue, as she was just returning home. But I hardly knew her or her boyfriend. How could I impose at this late hour?

I truly felt homeless then. How could I have been so stupid? So presumptuous? Why did I have two sets of my neighbour's keys? Why did I leave my own house keys in my suitcase? Why didn't I take back my spare set from my builder? Why didn't I colour my own keys with red nail polish to distinguish them from the neighbour's?

Taxi from Heathrow

On this particular Sunday, the tube from London Heathrow Airport into town wasn't working. Father was tired, and so was I. So queuing for a cab was the automatic thing to do.

The driver asked if we knew where we were going. I said yes and told him where to go. We waited for him to go to the traffic warden. But he turned around and hurried us, "Go

on. Get in the cab." Instinctively I knew something wasn't right.

I dismissed my female intuition and got in the cab with my father. He made the turn I had suggested around the same time that I discovered that it was a turn too early. So he got back on the road, only to meet a traffic jam. Seeing that the next turn wasn't correct either, I told him that it was the one after that. He didn't respond. So I repeated myself.

"Yes. Yes. Yes. I heard you. I KNOW," he said in a very irritated voice.

I quickly said, "You don't have to be rude."

This started a negative spiral. Our communication broke down. He didn't want to be in a traffic jam. I reminded him that I didn't either - and that I was paying for it. Back and forth. Back and forth.

By the time we got home, I was absolutely fuming.

No money, go walking

The true value of something is revealed when you don't have it. In other words, you don't know what you're missing until you don't have it. Sounds like common sense.

Rushing out of the house today, I took a different bag - one which did not contain my wallet.

The consequence of this was that I had to walk long distances. Without money or a map, I had to rely on my instincts.

And my instinct was not too good in this hot and humid weather.

Bad timing. Wrong exit. Not being able to get hold of those waiting for me. Getting tired. All these contributed to my arriving one and a half hours late.

No network, not funny

My mobile phone has been registering "no network" for a few days now. I rang up Vodafone to

find out what's wrong with the network in my neighbourhood. Is it because the builders next door are working on the roof?

No, they said. Either there's something wrong with my SIM card or my phone. If it's the phone, then I need to take it to the shop I bought it from.

Since there's nothing wrong with my SIM card, it must be my phone. But my phone is less than 2 years old and it has a 3 year warranty!

The Carphone Warehouse shop in my neighbourhood was bombed out. So I had to take the train to the nearest branch, which happened to have a repair centre.

The lady at the counter told me that it would take a day to fix it.

I cycled back the next day only to be told that the resident engineer couldn't fix it and it would have to be sent away. Because it's not covered under the warranty, it would take anywhere from two to four weeks to get it fixed or replaced. And it would cost between 30 and 75 pounds.

Well, well, well. What am I supposed to do in the meantime?

Actually, I was quite relieved not to get any calls. This gave me the excuse to be irresponsible, unaccountable, and free. However, I'm still paying the monthly fees to Vodafone! They don't allow a break in the billing. So it's one of those - use it or lose it deals.

Phone service

The whole point about switching back to British Telecom was to get a better Internet deal, provided that I get to keep the same phone number.

I repeated this speech to the BT advisor this morning after discovering that I've been given a new line, without access to my existing Cable and Wireless line which still worked. Why would I want to pay for two working lines when I can only get access to one?

How am I supposed to tell my friends about the new number -

which after a month will no longer exist?

Considering the five hours that the BT engineer had spent yesterday, it couldn't have been a more difficult job to connect a pre-existing BT line to a pre-existing socket in my home. When he was leaving, he mumbled something about a different telephone number. I had to call the BT advisor to find out just what that number was.

This would make such an interesting story for OFTEL to savour. Three phone calls - and the customer still hasn't got what she wanted. Not only have I been inconvenienced greatly this weekend, I have even more phone calls to make to get the Internet connection working.

No wonder Cable and Wireless hasn't bothered to offer a more competitive Internet access. No wonder telecom providers in this country aren't enthusiastic about getting new customers. No wonder customers would rather stay with their existing providers. It's a major pain to SWITCH!

Trying to connect

Since Monday I have been trying to connect to the Internet. "No dial tone," my laptop flashed repeatedly. Whether it's AOL or ATT, whether it's through the telephone or directly from the wall, whether it's from the bedside outlet or the desk outlet, the result was the same: no dial tone.

My colleagues were able to connect from the hotel and from the exhibition floor. I tried there too. Same result. Somebody said something about disabling the dial tone. I ignored it because I couldn't find it.

Could I have possibly ruined the modem on my way here? Could the cables be damaged? Are they protesting about being on the road for too long?

The Sheraton Essen staff were kind enough to let me use their business centre on the same floor as my room. However, my lack of familiarity with the German keyboard hindered my usual touch typing. I typed Z

instead of Y and vice versa. Finding the @ key was even more difficult.

Today I called my computer guru friend who suggested that I run a diagnostic from the control panel modem properties. Lo and behold! There was the switch for turning off the dial tone. As if by magic, I connected! But only for a few seconds, as my Internet account had been cancelled and I needed to set up a new one.

So I figured I would access the Internet from the business centre. After booting and rebooting several times in English and then German, I still could not get the computer to detect its modem. Once more the damsel in distress, I called reception for help. It turned out that the hotel's Internet connection was down. There was never need for a modem because it was all ISDN.

When I finally got access to the Internet, I had only half an hour before I needed to check out of the hotel altogether. It took me ten minutes to find the correct website to register a new account. I copied down my new user name and password. Good, I can just about make it back to my room and try it on my laptop.

Not so fast. I must have copied the password wrong! I still couldn't get in! Now what?????



Anne Ku

Editor's note:

Why does it always happen to me? Am I accident prone? Or do I see a half-empty glass? When things go wrong, it's an opportunity to learn. But in this time-challenged and attention-deficit information society, people only have time to keep afloat and swim forward.

One of my readers wrote a parody: Computer Has Broken to the tune of Cat Steven's Morning Has Broken, in response to my Bon Journal entry: Victim of technology.

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