

In 1983, I Had the First Personal Computer in my Office.
Portable Personal Computers were So New, I Became the First Help Desk, and
I Tried to Use Analogies to Explain the Process

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The first generation Personal Computer (PC) was released in 1981.

I have been working with computers since 1983 when my boss gave me a Zenith Z-171 Portable Personal Computer (PC) and told me that they did not have any budget money for courses, so I should teach myself. Other than the thick difficult to understand owners operating manual, there were very few books on the subject. <https://oldcomputers.net/zenith-z-171.html>

Since I was the first one in my office to use a Personal Computer, I became the first Help Desk, but they did not have that term yet.

Personal Computers were so new to everyone; so *I tried to use analogies to explain the process, but sometimes it was lost.*

Formatting a Floppy Disk

New 5¼-inch Floppy Disks had to be formatted to mark the surfaces of the disks to accept the software before use. When I was asked why the floppy disks had to be formatted, I explained to my co-workers:

“Just like you cannot use a gift until you remove the giftwrap paper, you have to format the floppy disk before you can use it.”

One person in the office walked away saying, “He said it has something to do with giftwrap paper!”

Is Data on a Screen Lost When Shut Off?

When someone asked what to do when the computer is turned off before saving data, I explained to my co-workers:

“Just like a flashlight losses its light when shut off, when a computer, which displays photons that are light waves on the screen, is shut off, it no longer has light or data.”

“You can never save too many times!”

There Is a Wave Going Across My Screen

The Zenith Z-171 Portable Personal Computer (PC) had a small processor so that when data changed, a ‘Wave’ would start at the top of the screen and change the data on the screen as it flowed downward. I explained to my co-workers:

‘Just as a wave moves sand on the shore, a computer wave changes the data on the screen.’

Gently Tap the Side of the Computer to Make It Run Faster

My co-workers were not very patient when operating computers. To give them something to do while waiting, I told them:

“Gently tap the side of the computer to make it run faster.”

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Secret Macro Headquarters

Our Personal Computers were only loaded with Lotus 123 Spreadsheet Software without any word processing or spell checks. I wrote the first auditing program and I posted the macro commands at a special spreadsheet location at Z101, far from where the work was inputted.

I told everyone not to go to the special location because it could break the commands. I explained:

“The macros commands are at ‘Secret Macro Headquarters,’ shush, don’t go there!”

Someone would often ask me, “Where were we not supposed to go?” “I would shout:

“It’s ‘Secret Macro Headquarters,’ don’t go there!”

No Computer Screen Backlight

My first Zenith Z-171 Portable Personal Computer screen did not have a backlight, which made it hard to see. I found that if I worked in a conference room with the lights out, I could see the screen better and I used a flashlight to see my paperwork; *but I was computerized!*

Inevitably, someone, usually my boss, would come into the conference room, turn on the lights, and say, *“You’ll see better with the lights on!”*

Later, my Zenith Z-171 Portable Personal Computer screen was replaced with a computer that had a backlight.

Sorted Inventory ID Numbers

Once a year someone in our office would be assigned to take inventory all the furnishings and items in the office, including listing the Inventory ID Numbers for each item, and one year it my turn. Generally, it was written on a light green 13-column spreadsheet paper. Since I now had a Portable Personal Computer (PC); using Lotus 123 Spreadsheet Software, I ran around the office with my computer and inputted the Inventory ID Numbers in Column A. and the Inventory Item Name in Column B. Then I sorted the Inventory ID Numbers from lowest to highest and made a heading labeled Office Furniture Inventory, to produce a beautiful spreadsheet.

I showed my spreadsheet to my boss and he said:

“I don’t really trust computers and I think it is just a fad!” “I want you to do the furniture inventory on light green 13-column spreadsheet paper; *just the way we always did it!”*

Reluctantly, I followed his request, but I merely copied the sorted numbers from my computer. *Incidentally, my boss also did not trust automatic teller machines (ATM).*

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Two Floppy Disks to One Floppy Disk

My Zenith Z-171 Portable Personal Computer (PC) had dual 5-1/4-inch floppy drives (No Hard Drive) and booted up by placing a MS-DOS Floppy in Drive A and waiting for the software to load. After a while, a 'C: Prompt' appeared on the screen, then the MS-DOS Floppy was removed from Drive A and then a Lotus 123 software floppy was placed in Drive A, and a 'Formatted' 5-1/4-inch floppy was placed into Drive B; where the data would be stored.

I discovered that to save time I could copy the MS-DOS Commands directly to the Lotus 123 Software floppy. I explained it to my boss and at first he said, "I think that is patent or copyright or infringement, but I do not know." I explained that software was so new and since it was intangible it could not have a patent and as to the copyright infringement, we owned the software so we could do anything we wanted with it.

My boss added, "*Okay, but just don't tell anyone outside the office.*" I explained the process to my co-worker, set up their computers while my boss watched, and it saved a lot of time for everyone.

Right, That's a Computer on Your Shoulder!

When going through airports, a security guard would look at my Portable Personal Computer (PC) *on my shoulder without a bag* and ask what it was and I would say it was a computer.

One airport guard did not believe me and said, "*Right, that's a Computer on Your Shoulder!*" I lowered the keyboard to reveal the blank screen. Then he took out a screwdriver and started to open up the back. I shouted, "*You are not going to open that up!*"

I closed the keyboard, put my computer back on my shoulder, and walked through the metal detector, which sounded, but he did not stop me.

When I told the story in my office, one of my co-workers said:

"No one at the airport checks my green 13-column spreadsheet paper!"

Do you have any Cameras or Recording Devices?

During the Cold War, I visited an Aerospace Fortune 500 Company headquarters.

When I entered the building, the security guard asked, "*Do you have any cameras or recording devices?*"

I said, "No, but I have a computer on my shoulder." Since few people traveled with computers in those days and he probably never saw one, he said, "*Well I guess it is okay.*"

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Electrical Outlets Do Not Provide Access to Mainframes

When I visited a Fortune 500 Company headquartered in a very old New York City Skyscraper, I worked with an older director who was not at all familiar with computers.

The Director guided me to a conference room where I would be working and once I settled in, I noticed that the wall outlet was only a two-prong receptor, but my computer had a three-prong plug and I needed an electrical adapter that permits a 2-prong outlet to accept a 3-prong plug.

I asked the Director if she or someone in her office had an electrical adapter. She explained:

“It is company policy not to provide electricity to visitors, because it would give access the Company’s Mainframe Computer.”

I tried to explain that I was only plugging in my computer for electrical power and that no one could access the Company’s Mainframe Computer through the electrical outlet, but she would not accept my explanation, so I suggested that she ask the people who operated the Company’s Mainframe Computer.

At a nearby drug store, I purchased an electrical adapter and successfully operated my computer from the 2-prong outlet without access to the Company’s Mainframe Computer.

Could We Borrow Your Portable Personal Computer?

Once I visited a Technology Fortune 500 Company headquartered in Minneapolis, MN. When the electrical power went out for the entire downtown area, their office did not have any lights, electricity, or computers. My Zenith Z-171 Portable Personal Computer that had a battery *was the only computer operational in the entire company.*

The Director asked me if they could borrow my Portable Personal Computer to calculate a return today that was due tomorrow so that they could have it ready to mail the next day when power should be restored. I agreed, explained how my computer worked, and went back to my hotel.

People with Mechanical Ability Do Well With Computers

Eventually my office created a Help Desk Department, but I would assist them teaching computer classes.

I discovered that *people with mechanical ability do well with computers* and people who cannot figure out mechanical things, seldom will do well operating computers. I think it is due to *the ability to recognize spatial perception or relationship of objects*; including the screen, keyboard, and mouse.