

In the 1980's computers, and especially computer networks, were just beginning to become a vital part of the everyday life of scientists and engineers. The company that I first worked for attempted to control their use by establishing a central computer system that was communicated with via remote punched card readers and line printers. Jobs were submitted and after a few hours, the results would return. Errors were studied and (hopefully) corrected, and the job would be run again. Woe to the person who dropped their program card deck!

My friend and co-worker David Elrod assembled a local network that used Digital® PDP-11 computers and its own 7.5 inch floppy disks and larger hard disk storage system. He worked with the operating system software and introduced clever monologues in the log-in statements, depending on what the time of day was, that would inform me about which carbonated beverage it was time to consume (he preferred the numeric system, but I called them Coke A, Coke B, etc. just to annoy him).

The members of the team pranked each other mercilessly with the system, using the excuse that the behavior facilitated our learning. We made others think that all of their files were deleted, sent special messages that were difficult to trace, and performed other intriguing activities. Mostly, each of us had too much access to the system for our own (or for others') good. And David loved to pit us against each other with creative suggestions and watch the fun without having any official part in it.

I never was able to really get the last word, as David was the master of the system. But I tried many things in hope that at least one would have a real impact. Probably the best trick I pulled on him was good because he revealed to me many years later that he had no idea what was going on.

David was very meticulous about recording his daily activities in a log that was kept on the main memory of the computer. He was proud of this log, and frequently used it to remind himself what he had done, what he had learned, and what was planned for the future.

What I did was to enter the log every few days and change a few things. Little things, you know, so the no one would be hurt or equipment damaged – just slight changes that would make him wonder. I always kept a backup of the unchanged information in another file.

I kept expecting him to say something about it, but David was usually pretty silent when it came to someone getting the better of him, and I figured that he had just discovered what I was doing and was getting his information from the backup files.

Years later, when one day we were trading stories about our mischievous activities, I laughed as I told him about the times I would change his log. He gave me a strange look, and told me that he had always been confused about what was going on. He would read his log and wonder why he had written those entries. He had never known it was me! After all of that time, I finally had the feeling of great victory!

Now I see it in the context of the Word of God. Not that David's words were any comparison, but I can imagine the frustration when we distort God's Word. He warned against it¹, and though there is some room for interpretation in certain cases and places, it is best not to mess with it. We should just learn it and make it a part of us.

1. Deuteronomy 4:1-2, “Now, Israel, hear the decrees and laws I am about to teach you. Follow them so you may live and may go in and take possession of the land the Lord, the God of your ancestors, is giving you. Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the Lord your God that I give you.”
Deuteronomy 12:32, “See that you do all I command you; do not add to it or take away from it.”
Revelation 22:18-19, “I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this scroll: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this scroll. And if anyone takes words away from this scroll of prophecy, God will take away from that person any share in the tree of life and in the Holy City, which are described in this scroll.”

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