

Column: *From Editor*
Figures: *NONE*
File for Companion Disk: *None*

Code Rage

Whil Hentzen

There is a TV set in Graceland (Elvis Presley's old digs) that bears a very significant feature – a bullet hole. Evidently Elvis saw something on the tube that he didn't like.

Do you ever get mad at the tube? I mean the computer tube, of course.

I've been seeing more and more evidence of this – people posting messages on electronic forums or newsgroups without thinking through what they wanted to say, or even people emailing each other, pressing Send before they should have. Drew Speedie referred to it as “Code Rage” at FoxTeach a couple months ago.

Whenever I get one of these, it's pretty tough not to take it personally. You're just up on one of the newsgroups, trying to help out, and someone comes out of left field and flames you badly enough to make a sailor blush. Jeepers. Time to quit the volunteer help game, eh?

Before you get all worked up about being on the receiving end, step back for a second. Yeah, it's possible that the sender is a rotten person. There are a few of those out there – the ones that seem bent on taking something the wrong way, or venting their anger at anyone foolish enough to show up in public. But more likely, the person was just having a “bad code day.” And you've had those as well, haven't you?

So instead of responding to a “nastygram” in the same vein, try helping them out of their funk. They've already lost the respect of many people for mouthing off inappropriately in public – why dig that hole deeper? 24 hours later, they'll be really embarrassed and will appreciate you trying to help out, instead of returning the nastiness back. If they continue to be nasty, you can pigeonhole them into the “Huge chip on their shoulder so I don't want to have anything to do with this person again” slot and forget about them.

But what about those senders? If you're potentially on the sending end, then you might consider a trick that Woodrow Wilson used when he was President of the United States way back when. He would write a venomous letter to an individual whom he felt deserved it. And remember, back in those days, one didn't use a string of four-letter words to express anger – one had to be considerably more clever. So upon reflection, consider what a nasty letter that didn't include profanity might have looked like – and how it would have been received in those times.

The trick Wilson used, however, was never to send them. He'd write the letter, and put it in a desk drawer. And there it would stay – for good. Unfortunately, about fifty years after he died, someone found that stack of letters, and published a book containing the juiciest ones. Engaging reading, if you're interested...

So go ahead and vent. But before you press Send, think about whether or not your mother would be proud of you for sending that missive. Then save that document somewhere other than Drafts, and call it a day.