

Humor Me

By Ronald P. Culberson

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“Handy Man”

Here’s an equation I never learned in college calculus: $DASHP = 10 \times TYTIWT$ or the Duration of Any Simple Home Project is equal to 10 times the Time You Think It Will Take. I think this was one of the lesser known Theorems developed by Pythagoras, the Greek math genius. He probably discovered the theorem while installing kitchen cabinets for Mrs. Pythagoras.

The average male is only averagely equipped to tackle a home improvement project. Sure, we’re skilled in weekly turf reduction techniques and incandescent replacement theory (that’s mowing and changing light bulbs for you lay people). But when it comes to anything related to machinery, water flow or electricity we’re mere apprentices. My friend Lou Heckler’s “tool box” only contains a hose and a hammer. He says, “If I can’t hit it or wet it, I can’t fix it.”

That’s why it takes longer for most of us to do those so-called simple projects. For those of you unfamiliar with the Home Project Theorem, let me show you how it works.

Last weekend, my outdoor light timer stopped working. This handy device automatically turns on the outside lights so that robbers think we’re at home even when we’re not. It’s a brilliant concept and I’m sure the robbers aren’t aware that any of us have them. Shhhhh.

Even though I had hired an electrician to hardwire the timer to the light switch, I thought, “How tough can it be to put in a new one? It should only take a few minutes.” Of course that’s “10 x (a few minutes)” according to the Home Project Theorem.

Let’s break down the equation so that you can see each time consuming step.

Step 1 (1 hour): I bought a new timer at the big orange home improvement store. They only had one and it was a different model than the old one. But, I figured there must be standard specifications in the light timer industry and assumed it would fit. Note: False assumption.

Step 2 (20 minutes): I prepared the work area and began the one-minute process of removing the brass switch plate. However, one of the screws was stripped. While sticking the screwdriver behind the switch plate to put pressure on the stripped screw, I

realized I had forgotten to turn off the electricity. In theory, one should only forget that once. I turned off the electricity and removed the plate.

Step 3 (20 minutes): I disconnected the old timer. The housing popped off with such force, pieces went everywhere. Note: It's important to inventory parts before you lose them. That way, you know what you're looking for.

Step 4 (30 minutes): I installed the new timer device and it wouldn't work. I replaced the batteries twice and re-wired it. I also turned the electricity off and on several times just in case there was a clog in the line. That seems to work with plumbing projects. Finally, I got the timer working and started to replace the switch plate. It didn't fit. It wasn't even close.

Step 5 (20 minutes): I disconnected the new timer and took it *and* the switch plate back to the orange store to get some advice. Note: Everyone in the entire world goes to the orange store on Saturdays looking for advice. I was on my own.

Step 6 (1 hour): I compared every switch plate in the store to my timer. Nothing fit. I was going to have to rig something up. Note: This never works. I bought two switch plates to cover one hole in the wall. Seemed reasonable.

Step 7 (20 minutes): Back home, I removed the two new switch plates from the bag and realized I had accidentally stolen a third one. It must have fallen into the bag when I was comparing sizes. Now, I'm looking at one more trip to the store and a possible police record. I wonder if this is how Martha Stewart started.

Step 8: I displayed the new plan for my wife. She said, "That looks awful."

Step 9 (3 hours): I returned the wrong switch plates and apologized for shoplifting the other one. I went online and ordered the correct one. I installed the new timer and covered the open hole with cardboard. I programmed the new timer and it worked. I took a nap.

Step 10: The next day, the lights came on 10:00 a.m. I put a new hole in the wall.

And that is the Home Project Theorem.

Until next time, just humor me.

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Ron Culberson, MSW, CSP, CPAE is a speaker, humorist, and author of four books including Do it Well. Make it Fun. The Key to Success in Life, Death, and Almost Everything in Between. His mission is to change the workplace culture so that

organizations are more productive and staff are more content. He shows people how to have more FUN while preserving the integrity of the work they do and the lives they lead. For more information, visit www.RonCulberson.com.