

Hooked On Recovery

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Spyware

Last week, my laptop computer started to act up. It would work fine for about 30 seconds then the hourglass would come on and the system would bog down. Not just a little, a lot. To open a Word document took about 17 hours. I discovered through Task Manager that a small program called wuaclt.exe was responsible. It's not like I knew exactly how to diagnose the problem. Oh no, this took me about 87 hours. Through some internet research (on a functioning computer), I learned that the wuaclt.exe usually has to do with a Windows Automatic Update Function OR it could be a version of spyware called a Cult Trojan. I have no idea what a Cult Trojan is but it certainly sounded nasty. I spent more hours trying to remove the wuaclt.exe. I rebooted and rebooted, tried something, rebooted again. I was reminded of one definition of insanity, doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results. I was getting the same result.

I came into the office after a long weekend of doing the same thing over and over again and Cheryle taught me about Safe Mode. That F8 key is magical, but who knew? So then started a long process of uninstalling software, running virus scans, downloading software, running spyware and adware scans, downloading registry cleaner software and cleaning the register, blah blah, blah. Registry Mechanic found something like 9,287 errors and Spyware Doctor found another 14 billion errors. After following these programs suggestions, I cleaned up my registry and repaired my errors. I rebooted for the 987th time with little expectation. Sure enough, 42 seconds after it started, it bogged down, that little wuaclt.exe kicked in and froze my computer. I pictured my laptop being hurled against a brick wall, but no, it did not end up in pieces. It owes its life to all the peace and serenity (ha) I have gained through my years of recovery. Instead, I rebooted in Safe Mode (again), went into Explore mode, I found that Cult Trojan bugger of a program through the Find function. I stared at it. There were two versions of it. What to do? With a curious mixture of malice, dread, hope and perverse joy, I DELETED them both!! Ha ha!!

Reboot number 988 resulted in a revived computer! Yes! There was joy in Mudville. I could work it like normal, all the functions functioned. The nasty bug was gone. Ha ha! Time to reinstall software, the first being my smartphone software. The install was proceeding nicely, when... uh oh... the nasty "error" screen pops up. Deleting that exec was not a good idea. Probably should have talked with someone more experienced. Now I know I'm done for. And I knew it.

After many more hours of uninstalling, rebooting, installing, rebooting I have nothing to show for it. Somewhere in this process, the wuaclt.exe emerges from the tomb and resurrects itself. When it kicks in, I have to restart by holding down the power button (not a good idea either) because the system is now frozen. I start up in Safe Mode and delete wuaclt.exe again. Now I'm faced with a difficult choice. I decide to do what must be done. After saving two years of stuff (including email messages) on CD's, I pull the plug. I kill my computer with the intention of reviving it. This is scary. Will I damage it beyond the point of no return? Using the dangerous F12 key and the Windows XP Operating System CD, I wipe out the system and begin to reinstall it. All signs look good, this will take awhile, but my laptop would be reborn.

I'm happy to report that my laptop is happy and I'm happy. It's just one big circle of happiness around here now. I'm grateful for the fresh start. This newer version is an improved version. I've deleted a lot of the programs and documents that I wasn't using. I've upgraded from Outlook Express to Outlook. I've adopted the Outlook Calendar, Contacts and Tasks functions and in effect, streamlined my time management. But what a process. Spyware sucks. Adware sucks. These little programs come in from the internet and send info out from your computer. I didn't ask for them and you didn't ask for them to be in your computer either. Now I have set up a cyber defense force against enemy invasions: Spyware Doctor, Windows Firewall and McAfee Virus Scan are on guard continuously keeping my computer safe. The same thing happens with my mind in recovery.

The world is bombarding me with signals and I have to keep my defenses up. Some of the things I see are simple, lower-risk Adware programs: for example, the beer in the frosted mug. I can block that one pretty easily, but I still have to exercise caution. Then some other Spyware might find a foothold: like when I get a little depressed or angry or lonely or tired and I think I might need something to make me feel better. Thank God, I have a program to root that thought out. However, the most insidious could be the Trojan Cult to the recovering person's mind - resentment. A single resentment can go a long way to bogging down my mind. If I don't stop it immediately, it can burrow its way deep into my operating system effectively hampering my very existence. Resentment has the lethal potential to turn into a drink or drug. In that case, I'll be more than bogged down; I'll be frozen, nonfunctional and/or dead. I must keep my defenses on guard.

I must pray, attend meetings, trust God, clean house and help others because I don't want anybody rebooting me over and over again. I don't want anybody scanning me and repairing me. I don't want anybody uninstalling and reinstalling my software. I don't want anybody pushing and holding down my power button until the lights go off. And I certainly don't want anybody reinstalling my entire operating system. I like the one I got.

Hooked on Recovery is a biweekly message from CCAR Executive Director Phillip Valentine, person in recovery since 12/28/87, devoted husband, a father of five and just another surf fisherman. These thoughts, views and opinions reflect on his personal recovery and are not meant in any way to speak for the entire recovery community. He welcomes all your comments and suggestions on this column, email him at phillip@ccar.us. Visit the website at www.ccar.us to read the entire series.