

Murphy Was an Optimist

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For a number of years I have been interested in the teachings of the great philosopher by the name of Murphy. Perhaps you have heard of his Law of the Perversity of Matter which states "Whatever can go wrong, will, and at the most inopportune time." After the week I have just had, I think I can safely say that Murphy was an optimist. Let me explain.

The radio station I work for is in the process of preparing to move. We are moving to a new wing of a building that houses our sister TV station. While some of the interior finish work still remains to be completed, the shell of the wing is done. The new wing has been built on the site that used to house two satellite receive dishes for the TV station and a transmit and receive dish for our radio station and network. The dishes were moved to various points in the parking lot until the building was done, and then they were to be moved to the roof of the building. This week was the big move to the roof.

Another part of this equation is a transfer of ownership of the radio satellite dish and the installation of some new electronics relating to it. Most of the new equipment arrived in the last two weeks, except for a few items that we were able to borrow for the interim.

The schedule as it related to my work was as follows:

Monday — move 10 meter TV receive dish and set up a temporary dish for the radio uplinking.

Tuesday — finish move of the 10 meter dish and begin moving the radio dish.

Wednesday — finish moving the radio dish and complete the electronics change.

Of course, all of this is complicated by the fact that the radio dish is in use 24 hours a day with only short openings for testing and down time. By now you have probably guessed that all did not go according to schedule.

Monday began with the dish movers arriving along with the rented crane. The dish movers ordered a 35 ton crane to handle the long reach required by the setback from the edge of the roof. The crane that arrived was a 20 ton unit. They tried to make the best of a bad situation but were unable to move the large dish completely on Monday.

Also on Monday the electricians were to connect the primary power for the uplink power amplifiers and move the uninterruptable power supply (UPS) to its new location. When they looked at the power connections on the power amplifiers, they were confused. We had ordered 110 volt single phase power since that is what the UPS puts out. We were provided with 208 split phase on the power amplifiers. Off to the telephone.

At the same time we were expecting some BNC connectors for the ends of our RG-11 IF cable. We used RG-11 to minimize losses since the IF run is about 200 feet. They were to arrive Monday. They didn't. Back to the phone. They should arrive first thing Tuesday morning.

Monday afternoon the temporary portable uplink arrived, right on schedule. Maybe something was going to go right today. No such luck. On the way to our location, the metal cover for the electronics assembly had come off. It was somewhere along the Pennsylvania Turnpike. No big deal since it was only for protection. However, we found out that the cover was necessary to maintain proper cooling and air flow through the unit. We had to whip up a temporary cover to keep things cool. As the dish was being set up, we found that some of the cables had not been packed with the system. Also, the 20 Amp circuit breaker for the air conditioner kept popping. Of course, this was the beginning of the longest and hottest stretch of weather for the year so far.

Deal with the problems one at a time. We increased the breaker, found some cables, and made the cover and taped it in place with some gaffers' tape. At about the same time we had a half hour window to bypass the UPS and remove it from its former location. The person we needed to contact for a clearance on one signal on the uplink was out to lunch. We missed the window.

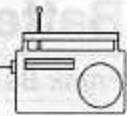
As the transportable uplink operator tried to set up and test the dish, more problems crop up. First he had problems finding the satellite. Another two and a half hours gone. Then one of his upconverters did not work. More delays. We finally decided to wait until Tuesday morning to get it all working.

Along comes Tuesday. Today the proper crane arrives, the testing of the portable continues okay, but the BNC connectors did not show up again. Back to the phone.

By mid-afternoon we had the only window for the day to change to the temporary dish and try to remove the UPS again. This time it all works. Less than a half hour later the dish movers begin to disassemble our radio dish. It is not until late in the day that we get any word back about the power problem with the power amplifiers. Also, the BNC connector supplier doesn't seem to be returning their phone calls from our dealer. Late in the day the power amplifier manufacturer decides to send out a technician to change the primary power. It is more than a simple jumper change and will take most of the day. Is Wednesday okay? Even later we get word on the BNC connectors . . . next morning.

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Wednesday morning comes and the power amplifier technician arrives to do his work. He will have to work around the electricians who are a day behind as well. However, the BNC connectors do not arrive. Back to the phones again. After a few more phone calls, we find out that the supplier really didn't have the connectors and nothing had been shipped after all. Our dealer does some more phone calls for us and finds half of the connectors we need for the project, in stock in town (this is Chicago after all). All we have to do is go get them. It will take about 2½ hours to go get them. We have to get the moved dish operating today since other aspects of the move have been done and passed the point of no return for at least part of the operation. Late in the day the connectors arrive and we get it all working (what we can) by 7:30 p.m. The rest of the connectors are in stock in North Carolina and will be drop shipped to us by overnight air so we have them first thing in the morning. Everything is powered up, but the UPS is not installed and the power wiring is only temporary. The electricians will finish tomorrow.

Thursday morning arrives but the connectors do not. Back to the phone. By this time we have already kept the transportable dish a day longer than anticipated. We need to get the rest of the operation moved today for a number of reasons. We continue with the various work related to it, while waiting for word on the connectors. About 1:00 p.m. we get a call from the dealer who asks to conference us. As I listen to the supplier, I can't believe my ears. He says he can't have them ready for pick up until 4:30 p.m. Remember, we are talking about only five BNC connectors. Some crazy story about entering everything in the computer. I

can't take any more and tell the dealer to call me back when they get it all resolved. To make a long story a bit shorter, we get the connectors in our hands about 4:30 p.m. We have a window beginning at 6:00 p.m. to do the final move. Put a few people to work on the connectors and keep your fingers crossed.

The connectors are on by 6:00 p.m. and we continue the move. We get it all sort of working by the deadline but find a loose connection two minutes before air time. We didn't have time to fix it right, so a clip lead does the trick. Audio levels are a bit of a guess, but it works on time.

Friday brings a new day. One program canceled on the uplink at the last minute gives us the longest opening of the week — three hours. During that time we tidy up all the levels, fix the loose connection, and call it done. Everything is working and installed, just two days late and with lots of aggravation.

I thought you might enjoy this story, since it shows that you are not alone when things go wrong. It is a bit like what I do when I start feeling bad about the work I need to do on my house (it's only about 100 years old). I go out and rent the movie "The Money Pit." It can always be worse.

Now you can have a chance to help me feel better. Do you have a story that can top this one, about how things go wrong? If so, send it to Radio Guide. It doesn't have to be long or fancy. We will even help clean it up a bit. For sending it in you will be entered in the annual Great Guide Contest. The winners will receive something from the Radio Guide "prize box," and you may even get your article printed. Good luck!

More about on the contest on page 1 . . . editor