

Keeping a visit a surprise after people have already guessed that you're coming

 devblogs.microsoft.com/oldnewthing/20080822-01

August 22, 2008



Raymond Chen

Last year, a friend of mine who lives out of state—let's call her Lisa—wanted to pay her family in Seattle a surprise visit, and I was enlisted as an accomplice. (Specifically, my rôle was to pick her up from the airport and take her home.) Everything was going smoothly until she made the mistake of telling one of another out-of-state relative about her plans. That relative then told a family member in Seattle, “Don't tell anybody, because it's a secret, but Lisa is making a surprise visit next week.”

And that family member told two more family members, “Don't tell anybody, because it's a secret, but Lisa is making a surprise visit next week.”

Soon this “secret” was known to half of the family. How do you recover from this?

The solution Lisa employed would not have occurred to me. When a family member who “knew” about her surprise visit called to say, “Hey, I know you're coming,” she would naturally act as if nothing of the sort was in the cards. “Where did you get that crazy idea? I just took a vacation a few weeks ago, remember? What do you think the odds are that my boss is going to let me take two week-long vacations in the span of a month?” Fine, everybody would probably think to do that.

But then she sold the deception by calling one of the family members back a few days later. “Hey, it's Lisa. I'm at the front door. Open up, I don't have my key.” With a shout of “I knew it!” the family member excitedly rushed to the front door, threw it open, and...

Darkness there and nothing more.

“Ha-ha! Psyche!”

Over the next few days, she repeated this prank on everybody who “knew” that she was coming to visit. In other words, she mocked her family for believing the rumor! (That, to me, was the stroke of brilliance.)

Upon her arrival in Seattle, I took her home, where she stood on the doorstep, took out her mobile phone, and called the house.

“Hey, it’s Lisa. I’m at the front door. Open up, I don’t have my key.”

“Cut it out, Lisa, this isn’t funny any more,” was the response, followed by a click.

And then Lisa rang the doorbell.

Psyche!

[Raymond is currently away; this message was pre-recorded.]

Raymond Chen

Follow

