No good deed goes unpunished: Marking a document as obsolete

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I was contacted by a customer support liaison who was hoping that I could help them understand Feature X.

> I saw your name on a "Feature X technical specification" document in the Windows specification repository, and I was hoping you could answer a few questions for me, or redirect me to somebody who can.

I was puzzled why this person saw my name on the "Feature X technical specification" document in the Windows specification repository, because I was not the author of that specification. I went to the specification repository, opened the document in question, and nope, my name appears nowhere in it.

I asked, "What gave you the impression that I had anything to do with Feature X? XYZ can help you with your questions; he's the one listed as the author of the document."

The response was, "Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't actually read the specification. I merely did a search through the entire repository for *Feature X*, and the "Feature X technical specification" is the one that showed up as most recently updated by you. In the past, this technique has been pretty good at finding someone who can help with a feature. Sorry about that."

I went back and took another look at the document, and then I remembered why I updated it: My duties at the time included reviewing all documents that met certain criteria, such as this particular document. I had some feedback about the document for the author, who told me, "Oh, that's an obsolete version of the document, but it's retained for historical purposes. The current one is over there." To save the next person some time, I edited the obsolete document by inserting in big letters at the top, "TECHNICAL DOCUMENTATION FOR THIS FEATURE HAS MOVED TO ⟨new location⟩. THIS DOCUMENT IS OBSOLETE." I could've asked the author to do this, but I had the document open already, so I figured I'd save a few steps (ask author to update document, wait for reply, reopen document to verify that edit occurred) and just do it myself.

Boom, no good deed goes unpunished. My update was made long after the real technical specification was completed. As a result, of all the documents on Feature X, not only is it the obsolete one that shows up as most recently updated, but I am the one listed as the person who made that most recent update.

Next time, I'll try to remember to do things the long way, even though it is big hassle for everybody.

"Please update the document to indicate that it is obsolete and redirect the reader to the current document."

— *Could you do that? You've already got the document open.*

"No, I used to do that, but it came back and bit me, because I become the person to edit the document last, and then everybody comes to me with questions about the document instead of you."

— *You do realize that in the time you tried to convince me to do it, you could've just done it.*

Follow-up: I tried it, and sometimes the response was "I'm really busy now, I'll get around to it in a few weeks." Now I have to create a reminder task in two weeks to follow up. More hassle for everybody.

I think the next time this happens, I'll write back, "I'm coming over to your office. I'll make the one-line edit *on your computer* so that your name is the one attached to the edit."

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