

Be careful with that thing, it's a confidential coffee maker

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For a time, Microsoft and IBM were collaborators on a project known as OS/2. You might have heard of it.

For the most part, the work was done separately, with the Microsoft engineers working in Redmond, and the IBM engineers working in Boca Raton, commonly nicknamed *Boca*. There were some Microsoft engineers who were sent to the IBM Florida office to serve as liaisons.

During this period, IBM tracked what they called “security violations”. These included things such as tailgating through a locked door without swiping your ID badge,¹ leaving the office with papers on your desk,² or wearing shorts to work.³ According to one legend, you would be fired after your sixth security violation. A variation of that legend said that Microsoft would have to dismiss three employees after amassing a cumulative ten violations.

Microsoft was not known for its strict corporate policies, and one of the Microsoft employees stationed in Boca reported that as a general rule, the Microsoft transplants had difficulty adhering to the rigid IBM standards of business conduct. According to one employee, “Sadly, six security violations did not in fact get you sent home to Redmond. I know: I tried.”

The only coffee available in the building came from a vending machine that accepted a large amount of money and produced in return an undrinkable brown liquid. The Microsoft employees chipped in to buy a cheap coffee maker and put it in their shared offices. But it was identified and cited as a fire hazard and security violation.

Part of the Joint Development Agreement included a clause that the Microsoft offices inside the IBM location were sort of a tiny Microsoft embassy, and anything marked “Microsoft Confidential” could not be touched or examined by IBM. So the Microsoft employees took a cardboard box, wrote “Microsoft Confidential” on it, cut a cup-sized access panel in the side, and put it over the coffee maker.

Since the box was labeled “Microsoft Confidential”, IBM security could not look inside.

Fire hazard eliminated. Coffee access preserved.

¹ Sure that makes sense.

² That's getting a little picky.

³ That isn't even a security issue!

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