

# No good deed goes unpunished: Helping to redirect a question

 [devblogs.microsoft.com/oldnewthing/20111025-00](http://devblogs.microsoft.com/oldnewthing/20111025-00)

October 25, 2011



Raymond Chen

It is a common occurrence that a question is sent to a mailing that is close, but not quite right. Usually somebody will provide information to help redirect the question to a more appropriate mailing list. But this effort does not always go unpunished.

**From:** X

A customer is encountering a problem with Product Q when they blah blah blah. Can somebody help?

**From:** Y

Support for Product Q is handled by Team R. Note that Product Q is out of mainstream support; you will need to have an extended support agreement.

**From:** X

Thank you. I have confirmed that the customer has an extended support agreement for Product Q. Please help me on how to proceed further with this case.

Person Y fell into the trap of being too helpful. If they had stopped after the sentence “Support for Product Q is now handled by Team R,” they might have gotten away clean. But no, they made the mistake of providing a tiny bit more information, and person X has now latched on. Here’s another example, and by an amazing coincidence, it came from the same Person X.

**From:** X

A customer is encountering a problem with Product P when they blah blah blah. Can somebody help?

**From:** Z

For this particular problem, I’d contact Team P.

**From:** X

Thank you for your prompt response. I look forward to the next update from you.

Person Z made the mistake of only implying the “If I were you...” before the sentence “I’d contact Team P.” Person X therefore interpreted the “I’d contact Team P” as saying “I will contact Team P for you.”

The moral of the story is that when you are redirecting a question to a more appropriate mailing list, you need to be very explicit that you are telling the person what to do and are not actually assuming responsibility for doing it. Otherwise you run the risk of being punished for being helpful.

- “Support for Product Q is handled by Team R. You need to send your questions to them.”
- “For this particular problem, you should contact Team P.”

**Bonus chatter:** Just last week I tried to employ the lesson from this message:

**From:** Q

A customer wants Feature X to behave like ZZ instead of YY. Can somebody help?

**From:** Raymond

In order to get it changed, you will have to file a Design Change Request with the X team.

Apparently even a statement this direct was not correctly interpreted.

**From:** Q

Thanks. I wanted to check about the request which the customer has requested to change Feature X to behave like ZZ instead of YY.

Not only did the person think that I had taken responsibility for resolving their issue, they thought I had written up the Design Change Request for them and submitted it to the X team!

Raymond Chen

**Follow**

