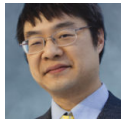


# That time the Word team hired somebody who never showed up, who turned out to be an important member of the team in spite of not being on it

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 [devblogs.microsoft.com/oldnewthing/20180903-00](https://devblogs.microsoft.com/oldnewthing/20180903-00)

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Raymond Chen

During an exchange of stories from the earlier days of Microsoft, I learned about the time the Word team hired somebody who never showed up.

It was the late 1980s or maybe early 1990s. The Winword team (as it was then known) hired a new employee, let's call him Alan Smithee. The team prepared an office for him, complete with nameplate, but for whatever reason, Alan backed out and decided not to join Microsoft after all.

This vital information never reached the Winword team.

So the Winword team had an office ready for a new team member, but no team member.

Eventually, somebody else moved into the office (who actually showed up for the job, thank you very much). But what about the nameplate?

An unidentified prankster removed the nameplate from an existing team member's door and replaced it with Alan's, making it look like Alan had taken over the office. Some time later, the prankster returned the team member's nameplate to its rightful place, but put Alan's nameplate beneath it, so it looked like the team member had an invisible roommate.

The mysterious Alan Smithee became a running joke on the team. He got blamed for everything.

Your water bottle is missing? Alan stole it.

The coffee maker isn't working? Alan broke it.

The power went out during the overnight build? Alan overloaded the circuit. Probably when he plugged in the coffee maker. And then spilled your water on it.

Alan was such an integral part of the team that they even included him in the credits. One of the team members still has Alan's nameplate as a memento.

The story doesn't end there, however.

Alan apparently remained on good enough terms with Microsoft that he was able to apply for and get a job at Microsoft several years later. That he showed up for.

This was discovered when one of the former members of the Winword team walked into a meeting and met a guy named Alan Smithee. That team member had to work pretty hard through the entire meeting to avoid laughing out loud, seeing as poor Alan was the unwitting butt of so many jokes.

It is not known whether the former team member had a chance to tell Alan about his important role in the early history of Word, or to find out why he didn't show up for work all those years ago.

Raymond Chen

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