

# No, you didn't win the Jethro Tull box set, and please tell everybody else in your area code to stop calling me

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Some time ago, a fellow employee started receiving mysterious fax calls at the office four or five times a day and had to call the Microsoft telephone services folks to block the caller. But this reminded another colleague of a much more annoying problem, and one for which caller-block would not have worked.

A local radio station had a contest line in the 206 area code. If someone in the 425 area code dialed this number without dialing the 206 area code prefix, they rang the phone of a new Microsoft employee. That employee's phone was set up incorrectly, and the calls ended up auto-forwarded to my phone. Every time the radio station ran a contest, my phone lit up like a Christmas tree.

The telephone services department had to retire the phone number that matched the radio station's number.

It's a pretty funny story, but only in retrospect.

Background information (simplified) for those unfamiliar with United States telephone dialing rules: To make a call within an area code, you just dial the last seven digits. To make calls between area codes, you dial all ten digits. The contest number was (206) 555-1212, and people in the 425 area code who forgot to dial the 206 prefix ended up calling (425) 555-1212 by mistake. (In parts of the country with *ten-digit dialing*, the area code is mandatory even for calls originating from the same area code.) **Forgot to knock on wood:** Barely a week after my colleague told the story of the radio station contest line, it happened again. The telephone department once again assigned the troublesome number to a new Microsoft employee, and due to the incorrect set-up, my colleague's phone once again started ringing whenever the local radio station announced a call-in contest.

This time, the telephone support people placed a permanent block on the troublesome phone number, so it will never be used for anything again. Well, more accurately, they tried three times, and the third time it finally worked (knock on wood). And nobody ever figured out why the number forwarded to my colleague's phone. Some things will always be a mystery...

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