

If you're asking somebody to help you, you want to make it easy for them, not harder

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A customer liaison asked a question that went roughly like this:

From: Liaison

My customer is having a problem with the header file winfoo.h. The environment is Windows Vista German SP1 with Visual Studio 2008 Professional German SP1 and Windows SDK 6000.0.6000 German. When they try to include the file in their project, they get an error on line 42. “The character ‘;’ was not expected here.” Can somebody help?

From: Raymond

Can somebody please attach a copy of the offending file? There are many versions of winfoo.h, and it’s not clear which version comes with Visual Studio 2008 Professional German SP1 + Windows SDK 6000.0.6000 German.

I figured that’d be easier than provisioning a new virtual machine, obtaining temporary license keys for all the products, then installing Windows Vista German SP1, Visual Studio 2008 Professional German SP1, and Windows SDK 6000.0.6000 German. All to get one file. A file the customer already has right in front of them. Where all that’s really interesting is line 42, and maybe a few lines surrounding it on either side. Time passes. The following day, another message arrives from the customer liaison.

From: Liaison

Anyone?

At this point, I engaged my thermonuclear social skills.

From: Raymond

By “somebody”, I meant “you”.

That went into some people's "Raymond Quotes" file. Remember, if you're asking somebody to help you, you want to make it easy for them, not harder. "Hey, Bob, I've got a jar of pickles, and I can't open the lid. Can you help?" Bob says, "Sure, I'll give it a try." "Great! The jar is in the storage room in the basement, on the third aisle, top shelf, second from the left."

Bob is now suddenly less interested in helping you open that jar of pickles. Shouldn't you go get the jar of pickles and bring it to him?

Raymond Chen

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