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We taught users to diagnose, then got annoyed when they did.

By **Keith Parsons, CWNE #3** · 2026-09-15 · originally on LinkedIn

Last week I wrote about the five shapes a Wi-Fi support ticket takes. The one I care about most is the shape where the user has already decided. The AP is bad, the channel is wrong, the new phones broke it. Their conclusion arrives and the observation is gone.

It is easy to blame the person who filed it. I want to make the opposite case.

Look at the form they filled in. Nearly every helpdesk field I have seen in 25 years asks some version of "what is the problem?" That is not a request for what happened. It is a request for a verdict. The field is a small box, the box expects a sentence, and a sentence that carries a verdict is shorter than one that carries an afternoon.

So the user does the reasonable thing. They compress.

"Wi-Fi is slow in the east conference room" is the compressed form of something far more useful. The long version might have been: it was fine at 9, I joined the call at 9:40, the video froze, the audio kept going, and the guy next to me on the same laptop model was fine.

That version takes ten more seconds to type and it contains the answer. Audio surviving while video dies points at throughput or loss. One person affected while an identical laptop beside them is fine points at that one device.

The short version sends you up a ladder with a spectrum analyzer.

Here is the part that costs real money. A ticket that names Wi-Fi as the cause hands you a negative to prove. Before anyone is allowed to look at DNS, DHCP, the uplink, or the application, you have to demonstrate that the thing the ticket blamed is not guilty. I have spent whole mornings proving Wi-Fi innocent.

None of that is the user's fault. They answered the question we asked.

So change the question. Not the portal, not the workflow, not the form vendor. The words in one field.

Instead of "What is the problem?"

Ask "What did you see, and when?"

I have watched that one edit change what arrives. People are good witnesses when you ask them to witness. They are poor diagnosticians because nobody trained them to be, and we keep sitting them in that chair anyway.

I still want their theory. I ask for it. I just want it second, after I know what they saw.

If you run a help desk: does your first field ask for a verdict, or for an observation?

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