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Keep your technology running

Have you (or your team) ever been called upon to fix something you thought was simple . . . and it wasn't? Whatever vexes your IT department, start with six troubleshooting basics from CompTIA.com's IT Pro site:

1. Identify the problem
2. Establish a theory
3. Divide and conquer
4. Repair the problem, or go back to test another theory
5. Test the solution
6. Provide feedback to the user

Additionally, Matt Prigge of InfoWorld adds, "Do no harm." Jumping in, pushing lots of keys and doing a quick fix may do more damage! Step back to assess the problem before you get started. This is especially true if the problem is mission-critical, and mistakes may extend the downtime. He also suggests sharing what you know to avoid duplication of efforts and researching carefully.

First, identify if the user is experiencing a hardware issue, a software issue, or possibly a peripheral issue (failing mouse, crumbs stuck in the keyboard, etc.) Once that's established, you can start a root cause analysis, and start with what the user was last doing when the problem occurred.

You will also need to reproduce the problem so you can begin your deduction by elimination. Document what you find, systematically, so that your solution is accessible later.

Starting some general corrective maintenance that have not been done in a while—such as clearing the cache or defragmenting the hard drive—is also important. Sometimes that's the problem, not a hardware or software issue. (Source: Troubleshooter.com)

Going in to rule out by elimination seems like a lot of work, but it isn't— especially when it's a vexing problem that was your first guess. It may not be a virus, but by dividing and conquering, you'll be able to get to the problem faster and provide an effective solution.