



I simply don't possess the patience or aptitude for complex technology-based conversation.

Cable chatter causes mental meltdown

by Mary Ellen Collins

WE'RE HAVING OUR cable company handle our TVs, the computer and the phones, so I make sure we schedule the hook-up at a time when John will be home. I simply don't possess the patience or aptitude for complex technology-based conversation.

When the cocky cable kid arrives, he says the job is "a piece of cake." I tune out his chattering to John about boxes, ports and synching. And, I'm thrilled when everything is functioning within an hour.

But when I flip the bedroom TV on later that day, every click of the remote takes me to a blank blue screen with a white channel number. John calls the company, which promises to send another guy at a time when John can't be home. I reluctantly agree to handle guy No. 2. He arrives, turns on the bedroom TV, spends five seconds with the wiring panel, and the TV picture reappears.

"The other guy forgot to something the something," he says. He doesn't use those words, but that's what I hear. Before he can offer further explanation, I thank him, act like I'm late for a meeting and hurry him out the door.

The next day, an unexpected third cable guy arrives and says he's a quality control manager who conducts random checks on recent service calls.

"Did you know a second guy had to fix what the first guy forgot to do?" I ask. He didn't and apologizes. I tell him everything's fine now and he says, "Did the first guy something the other something so you get the something-something capabilities?"

"Beats me," I say, breaking into a sweat. He starts tinkering behind the living room TV and launches into



Illustration by Heidi Birky Goldman

an impassioned explanation of what should have been done with the set box related to the TV/DVR settings and why our TV watching lives will be so wonderfully improved now that he's doing it. He ignores the fact that my hands are up, and I'm backing away as I repeat, "This is lost on me. I don't want the details. I'm not a technical person."

He continues on, unabated. In desperation, I pick up the phone and say, "You need to tell my husband."

I get John, hand over the phone and the guy restarts his story about the range of features he has just activated, the only one of which I understand is the fact that when our phone rings, the number appears on the TV screen. And who really needs that? This goes on for 30 minutes,

during which I'm tempted to put my fingers in my ears and start singing in order to drown him out.

Finally John begs off. I stand by the open front door saying, "thanks for coming," until the guy exits 10 minutes later, still talking.

I used to think the definition of torture was having a power outage that cuts me off from my TV, computer and phone. Now, I know better. If anyone wants to make me spill secrets, just lock me in a room with a chatty cable geek, and I'll sing like a canary. ☹

Mary Ellen Collins is a freelance writer who lives in St. Petersburg, Fla., with her husband, John. When she's not writing about things that drive her crazy, she reads, draws, and frets about coming up with ideas for this column.