

Elevator Buttons – A Betrayal of Faith

I read something distressing in a newspaper a couple of weeks ago and have been obsessing about it ever since.

I don't remember what the article was about, but it made reference to the fact that the "Close Door" button on all U.S. elevators actually doesn't do anything at all and hasn't for decades.

What? Am I the last person to know? I didn't believe it at first, but a Google search revealed the close-door feature became obsolete a few years after the enactment of the Americans With Disabilities Act in 1990.

The legislation required that elevator doors remain open long enough for anyone who uses crutches, a cane or wheelchair to get on board, so no matter how enthusiastically you punch the button the doors don't close any faster. The buttons evidently can be successfully operated only by firefighters and maintenance workers who have the proper keys or codes.

In addition, the New York Times reported in 2004 (I must have missed that story) that the city deactivated most of the pedestrian buttons long ago with the emergence of computer-controlled traffic signals. More than 2,500 of the 3,250 walk buttons that were in place at the time existed as mechanical placebos. As of 2016 there are only 120 working signals, the city said.

Even worse, the Air Conditioning, Heating and Refrigeration News evidently reported in 2003 that it asked its contractor readers in an informal online survey whether they had ever installed "dummy thermostats." Of 70 who responded, 51 said they had. People "felt better" if they thought they could control the temperature.

I was complaining about the elevator close-door situation to LuAnn who said she suspected as much, but it made her feel better to punch the button anyway. "Get over it," she said.

Not me. I feel a sacred trust has been violated. I'll bet I've used those buttons thousands of times in the last 25 years, each time with the expectation that I was accomplishing something. I had an implied contract with the Big Elevator

consortium; when I punch the “Open Door” button the door opens. When I punch “1,” I go to the first floor. If the “Close Door” button doesn’t do anything, who is to say the Alarm button actually activates the alarm? For all I know the Chronically Jittery and Easily Startled Coalition successfully lobbied to disable them in 2007.

I’m not particularly religious, but if I say a prayer tonight my wish may or may not come true, and if it does, I can’t be certain it was precipitated by the prayer. Similarly, pressing a “Close Door” button now is much more of a prayer than a command. I suppose you could say that I used to have more faith in the Otis Elevator Corporation than God, technically speaking.

I thought back to the last time my trust had been betrayed so grievously, and it’s probably when I discovered there was no Santa Claus. You mean I’ve been good for over a month for no reason? What about those letters I sent to the North Pole? Who ate the cookies and milk? It took me a while to get over that one.

Possibly more shocking was the revelation that Dairy Queen serves no ice cream. Did you know that? Its soft serve can't legally be called ice cream according to FDA regulations, because the recipe doesn't include enough milkfat meet the FDA's official qualifications. I’ll have to get used to enjoying my “frozen treats.”

Now that I can’t take anything for granted - again - I’ve started to question everything I do that doesn’t render immediate and measurable results. Does the car sensor for that left-turn arrow know I’m there, or is it just mindlessly running through its cycle? Does that Nigerian prince really need the \$5,000 I sent him to unfreeze his \$80 million fortune?

And when I voted for Hillary Clinton did my vote actually go to Donald Trump? That would explain a lot.

Writers Group member Dave Parsons may not really exist, and you can’t prove that he does.