A great way to learn your electronic device

by Bryan Smith, LTCL Tech Coach

Today's column comes to us again from a library patron. They simply wanted to better understand their electronic device, and they came up with this idea which I've been using since I got my first cell phone! It's a simple idea that can reap great rewards. In fact, I use this technique almost every time I upgrade a device or install a new program/app on one of my devices.

Here's the idea… open the "Settings" and explore. It's that simple. I like that we seem to be using some universal icons (symbols) for settings these days… they are nearly always in the shape of a gear, or a wrench, or a screwdriver, or a combination of these like the icons I put at the top of this column. Nice. I like it when I can look at an icon and make an intelligent guess at what it does.

So, opening up settings on a smart phone will let you see things like Wi-Fi, Bluetooth, Display, Battery, etc. Tapping on Display, I'll be able to see some options like screen brightness or size of text on my screen – very useful. Tapping on Battery, I'll get some interesting information on my battery. Depending on your phone, you might see the health of the battery or what on your phone is using your battery the most.

This technique of exploring the settings is not limited to smart phones, tablets, and computers. If you have a Smart Thermostat, exploring the settings is a great way to find features and functions that you may have not known existed. For me, I learned that I could have my Smart Thermostat display the outdoor temperature and forecast. On my oven, I discovered that I could set the brightness of the clock to "Off" – I don't need another clock in our kitchen… the microwave that's touching the oven does this just fine, and I learned, by looking at the settings on the microwave, that there is no way to disable the darn clock. ☺

Same for software programs/apps. On apps running on tablets or phones, they could also be right behind an icon called "the hamburger" by user interface designers. What's the hamburger you say?

Well, it's generally three horizontal lines that look like this: ☰ Or it could also look like this ⚙ Or even just three dots on top of each other. Hopefully you can see how this icon got its name from the first one above.

Happy exploring.

Call for Tech Coach Corner Columns

This year, the topics for many of these columns have come library patrons. What topics interest you? What terminology have you heard that you don't understand, and even when you look it up on Google or somewhere else, you're even more befuddled? Please send your ideas/questions to us at techcoach@laketravislibrary.org.

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