

Dear Mr.X of Company Y

Edsger W. Dijkstra. (EWD707)

<http://www.cs.utexas.edu/users/EWD/ewd07xx/EWD707.PDF>

Dear Mr.X of Company Y.

You are the n-th ($n \gg 0$) representative of a commercial organization claiming to provide education and training for the computer professional, that solicits my cooperation. And for the n-th time my answer is "No."

A sample from your catalogue of services indicates that probably more than half of your courses aim at teaching how to live with --or even: how to convert to!-- IBM products. They may represent "training", but I cannot call them "education". The problem how to get useful work done with IBM products seems, indeed, severe --that, at least, is the only conclusion that I can draw from the vast number of courses your profitable company devotes to its numerous aspects--, but the problem seems better evaded than solved. (What about courses how to convert away from IBM products?) Industrial mistakes are not sacrosanct, just because they have been made on a large scale. From an educational point of view, your organization is on --or beyond-- the verge of fraudulence, and your invitation to cooperate with your endeavour can, therefore, be interpreted as an insult.

Presumable by way of temptation, you list the names of the "celebrities" of this education circus, whose ranks I could join by cooperating with your company. (I could even have my photograph reproduced in your next folder! How jolly!) I know most of them. When their work is sent to me, I leave it lying around in my University office, for the amazement of my visitors: usually it leaves them flabbergasted to see that such superficial stuff is not only printed, but apparently even sold. I would like you to understand that there exists a scale of values, according to which your invitation to join that crowd is also no less than an insult.

Without denying any responsibility for this letter, I may clarify it by explaining to you that it is all my wife's fault. When I asked her whether she wanted to be married to a millionaire, her immediate answer was "Please not!". When asked what made me pose that question, I explained to her the "educational circus" --remember Barnum's verdict?-- Kindly she said "Please try not to be too rude when you answer the bloke." I have done my best; her only fault is that she did not marry a gigolo.

EWD:ewd

Yours never,
prof.dr.Edsger W.Dijkstra

* * *

Well, actually I wrote him:

Dear Mr.X,

thank you for your letter of The enclosed material taught me that I am not a suitable speaker for the intended public, and hence I concluded that I should decline your invitations.

Sincerely,

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Transcription by Javier Smaldone.

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