A Word on Touching Other People's Devices: Don't.

Okay, that might be a little strong. But technologists often have an overpowering urge to lean over the shoulder of someone struggling with a computer or mobile device, and take over operating the machine. It's faster, it prevents running into dead-ends, and it lets the technologist think on their feet, rather than admit that they don't always know what to do next.

You should resist this temptation as much as possible. At the very least, you should *always* ask permission *before* you use someone else's device.

Why should you hold back from taking control of a learner's device?

- People learn by doing. If someone doesn't complete an exercise or action on their own, it will be much harder for them to learn, or understand what changes they've made to their own set-up.

- It can be violating to people's privacy and sense of personal space. Our anti-surveillance work is based upon the truth that computers contain a record of a user's most intimate thoughts and practices. We should live up to that ideal in respecting the privacy of those devices. Different cultures also have differing ideas of when and how physical proximity becomes invasive. Leaning in to help someone may feel acceptable to you, but it may be distracting or upsetting to the person you think you are helping.

- It can be disempowering. The biggest obstacle most technology users have to taking control of their digital lives is a lack of confidence in their own abilities to control their devices. It's very hard to defend yourself and protect your data if you grow accustomed to handing over control to another person or organization. We want learners to push a little past this instinct, and grow more comfortable with finding solutions themselves.

When you would normally reach over to type, mouse, or touch, try other techniques:

- Wait. Count silently to ten. Count again. It may feel excruciating, but most people need time to find their way around, and after overcoming their nervousness, will discover the solution on their own.

- Encourage the learner to verbalize what they're doing. "Talk through what you're doing right now." Making encouraging noises is often as useful as giving advice. (A surprising amount of what people say in these settings is not about the problem, but about their own inadequate knowledge of technology, or what is wrong with their device. It's okay to let this go unremarked, though you should aim to make them feel more empowered over time.)

- Explain what you would do, in general terms. Try not to give specifics. Don't say, "Click on the top of the browser window, and type w and w and w." Say instead, "I think at this point I'd want to visit the software's website. The web address is on this leaflet. We could visit the page in the web browser."

If a person asks you to step in, try to do the minimum to get them back in a known place. Describe what you're doing, as you're doing it—think of yourself as a tour guide, pointing out the sights. Ask for feedback to make sure your audience knows

what you're doing, and hand back control as soon as you can.