BILL'S HOME TECH

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The Routine That Just Stopped Working

Why a working routine suddenly fails — and how to find the one piece that broke

Plain-English smart-home help from:
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Tech Made Simple. Service Made Personal.

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SUMMARY

The 60-Second Version

A routine stops when one piece it depends on changes: a renamed or re-added device, an offline gadget, a changed trigger, or an unlinked account. Start by running the routine manually and watching which action fails — that separates a broken trigger from a broken action in one test. The most common cause is a device that was renamed or re-added, so re-point the routine to the current device.

If every action works manually but the routine never starts on its own, the trigger is the problem (time drifts after daylight saving, voice phrases clash). For a stubborn routine, deleting and rebuilding it fresh is often faster than hunting the fault.

1 The Short Version

Your morning routine used to turn on the lights, read the weather, and start the coffee — and now, for no reason you can see, it simply doesn't. A routine that stops working is one of the most puzzling smart-home problems, because nothing looks broken. But routines break for a small set of understandable reasons, and once you know them, they're straightforward to repair.

This guide walks through those reasons in the order a professional would check them, from a device the routine can no longer reach to a trigger that quietly changed. You don't need to understand how routines are built — just follow along until yours fires again.

- A routine usually stops because one piece it depends on changed or went offline.
- A renamed or re-added device is the most common hidden cause.
- The trigger — a time, a voice phrase, a sensor — may have changed or stopped.
- Rebuilding a stubborn routine from scratch is often faster than hunting the fault.

WATCH OUT

Start by running the routine manually from the app and watching exactly which parts work and which don't. If the lights come on but the coffee doesn't, you've found your culprit in seconds — it's the coffee maker's part that's broken, not the whole routine.

2 How a Routine Actually Works

A routine is just a little recipe: a trigger ('at 7 a.m.' or 'when I say good morning') followed by a list of actions ('turn on the lamp, read the news, start the plug'). For it to work, the trigger must still fire and every device in the action list must still be reachable by its exact name.

That's why routines are a bit fragile: they depend on several separate things all staying the same. Change any one — rename a device, let a plug go offline, alter a trigger — and the routine can stumble, even though every individual piece looks fine on its own.

GOOD TO KNOW

Think of a routine like a phone tree where every number has to still work. If one person changes their number and you don't update it, the whole chain breaks at that point. A routine breaks the same way when one device it 'calls' has changed.

3 Run It Manually to Find the Break

The fastest way to diagnose a broken routine is to run it by hand and watch. This turns a vague 'it doesn't work' into a specific 'this one step fails.'

1. Open the Alexa or Google Home app and find your routines list.
2. Tap the routine and look for a play or run button to trigger it manually.
3. Watch carefully: note which actions happen and which don't.
4. The first action that fails is where to focus your attention.

- All actions work when run manually the problem is the trigger, not the actions.
- One action fails that device or its link is the culprit.
- Nothing happens at all the routine may be disabled or deleted.
- An error message appears read it; it often names the exact device at fault.

> **WATCH OUT**
>
> Running a routine manually separates the two big possibilities in one test: a broken trigger versus a broken action. Knowing which it is saves you from checking things that were never the problem.

4 The Renamed-or-Re-Added Device

The single most common reason a routine stops is that a device it controls was renamed, removed and re-added, or replaced — so the routine is now pointing at a name or entry that no longer exists.

1. Open the routine and look at each action's device.
2. If an action shows a greyed-out, missing, or oddly-named device, that's the break.
3. Re-select the correct device from the current list.
4. Save and run the routine again to confirm.

- Renamed a light? The routine still wants the old name — re-point it.
- Removed and re-added a plug? It may be a new entry; the routine wants the old one.
- Replaced a dead bulb? The new one needs adding to the routine.
- Duplicate device entries? Delete the dead one and re-point the routine to the live one.

> **WATCH OUT**
>
> Be careful when renaming devices in a home full of routines — every routine that used the old name will quietly stop. If you must rename, plan to revisit your routines and re-point them afterward.

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5 When the Trigger Stopped Firing

If every action works when you run the routine by hand, but it never starts on its own, the trigger is the problem. Triggers change or fail for a few specific reasons.

- A time trigger can drift after a daylight-saving change or a time-zone muddle.
- A voice phrase may clash with something else, or you may be saying it slightly differently.
- A sensor trigger (motion, a door, sunrise) depends on that sensor still being online.
- A location trigger needs your phone's location permission still turned on.

1. Open the routine and check the trigger is still set the way you expect.
2. For a time trigger, confirm the time and days, and your home's time zone.
3. For a voice trigger, try the exact phrase, or set a simpler one.
4. For a sensor trigger, confirm that sensor is online in the app.

GOOD TO KNOW

Time-based routines sometimes slip by an hour around daylight-saving changes, which is why a 'good morning' routine suddenly fires at the wrong time in spring or fall. Re-checking the time setting puts it right.

6 Check the Devices Are Online

A routine can't control a device that's offline. If one action fails, confirm that device is actually reachable before assuming the routine itself is broken.

1. In the app, open the device the failing action controls.
2. Check whether it shows online or offline.

3. If it's offline, fix that first — power-cycle it, check its Wi-Fi and signal.
4. Once it's back online, run the routine again.

- An offline plug makes its routine action fail every time.
- A device on a weak signal may work sometimes and fail others — a flaky routine.
- A device behind a hub needs that hub online too.
- Fixing the device's connection usually fixes the routine with no further work.

> **TIP**
>
> A routine that works some mornings and not others almost always points to a device on a weak or flaky connection. The routine is fine; the device is drifting offline. Strengthen its signal and the routine steadies too.

7 When a Skill or Account Unlinked

Routines that control another brand's devices rely on a link between your assistant and that brand. If that link quietly logs out, every action involving that brand fails at once while the rest of the routine works.

1. Notice whether all the failing actions involve one particular brand.
2. Open that brand's own app and confirm the devices work there.
3. Re-link the brand's skill (Alexa: More, Skills & Games) or account (Google Home).
4. Let the assistant re-discover devices, then re-point the routine if needed.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> If a routine's lamp works but its third-party plug doesn't, and that plug works fine in its own app, the link between your assistant and that brand has slipped. Re-linking it restores every action that brand was responsible for.

8 Check the Routine Is Still Enabled

Sometimes the simplest answer is the right one: the routine got switched off, or a recent change left it disabled. It's worth a quick look before digging deeper.

1. Open your routines list and look for an on/off switch next to each one.
2. Make sure the stopped routine is switched on.
3. Check it wasn't paused by a 'guest mode' or similar setting.
4. If it was off, turn it on and test.

- A routine can be toggled off by accident while browsing settings.
- Some apps disable a routine automatically if it had an error.
- An app update occasionally resets routine switches.
- A quick glance at the on/off switch rules this out in seconds.

> **TIP**
>
> Before assuming a routine is deeply broken, confirm it's simply turned on. It's a ten-second check that saves people from rebuilding a routine that only needed its switch flipped.

9 Rebuild a Stubborn Routine

Sometimes the fastest fix for a routine that fights you is to delete it and build it again from scratch. A fresh routine, pointing at today's devices with today's names, sidesteps whatever got tangled.

1. Note down what the routine should do — trigger and each action — before deleting.
2. Delete the broken routine.
3. Create a new one, choosing the trigger fresh.
4. Add each action, selecting devices from the current list by their real names.
5. Run it manually, then let it fire on its own to confirm.

> **WATCH OUT**
>
> Rebuilding is often quicker than debugging, especially for a routine that's been patched over many months. Just jot down what it did first, so the new one does everything the old one did.

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10 Keep the App Updated

Routines sometimes break after — or because of — an app that's fallen behind. Keeping the app current heads off a quiet set of routine glitches.

1. Update the Alexa or Google Home app in your phone's app store.
2. Restart the app after updating.
3. Re-test your routines after any big app update.
4. Turn on automatic app updates so it stays current.

- App updates occasionally change how routines are stored, needing a re-save.
- An out-of-date app can fail to fire routines reliably.
- After an update, a quick test of your key routines is wise.
- Current apps are simply more dependable for automation.

GOOD TO KNOW

The makers change how routines work now and then, and an app left on an old version can fall out of step. A quick update and a re-test keeps your automations dependable.

11 Build Routines That Rarely Break

Once your routine is working, a few habits make routines sturdy so they keep running for months without attention. These are the same practices a professional follows when setting up automation.

- Name devices clearly and consistently, and avoid renaming them later.
- Keep the devices a routine uses on strong, steady connections.

- Prefer simple triggers (a set time) over fragile ones where you can.
- Keep a note of what each routine does, so repairs are quick.
- Clear out duplicate device entries that confuse routines.

1. Review your routines every so often and test the important ones.
2. Update your smart-home map whenever you add or rename a device.
3. Re-point any routine affected by a change right away.
4. Retire routines you no longer use to keep the list clean.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> Sturdy routines come from a tidy smart home: clear names, strong connections, and a habit of re-pointing routines after any change. Most routine trouble traces back to a rename or a drifting device — both easy to prevent.

12 When Two Routines Fight Each Other

Sometimes a routine 'breaks' because a second routine is quietly undoing it. If one routine turns a light on and another, set for a similar time, turns it off, the result looks like the first routine failing when really the two are at odds.

1. List all your routines and note what each one does and when.
2. Look for two that touch the same device at overlapping times.
3. Decide which should win, and adjust or remove the other.
4. Test to confirm the device ends up the way you want.

- A 'goodnight' routine turning everything off can cancel a later 'evening lights' one.
- A sunset routine and a fixed-time routine can collide near dusk.
- A shared device controlled by two routines is the classic conflict.
- Spacing routines apart in time avoids most of these clashes.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> Routine conflicts are sneaky because each routine works perfectly on its own — it's only together that they fight. Laying them all out side by side is the quickest way to spot two reaching for the same device at once.

13 Voice-Triggered Routines That Mishear You

If your routine starts with a spoken phrase, it can 'stop working' simply because the assistant isn't catching the phrase the way it used to — background noise, a slightly different wording, or a phrase too close to a built-in command.

1. Open the routine and read the exact trigger phrase it expects.
2. Say that phrase exactly, clearly, and from near the speaker.
3. If it's awkward, change it to something short and distinct.
4. Avoid phrases that clash with normal commands like 'turn on.'

- A long or unusual phrase is easy to mis-say — keep triggers short.
- Background noise can swallow the phrase even when the assistant heard its name.
- A phrase too close to a built-in command confuses the assistant.
- Adding a second, simpler trigger phrase gives you a reliable backup.

> **TIP**
>
> The best voice triggers are short, distinct, and natural to say — 'movie time,' 'good night.' If a routine's phrase keeps getting missed, renaming the trigger to something snappier usually fixes it instantly.

14 When to Call Bill

Many broken routines come down to a re-pointed device or a flipped switch, and this guide gets most people there. But tracing a fault across triggers, devices, and brand links — or rebuilding a web of routines — is quicker and calmer with help.

I make house calls across Portage County. I come to you, find exactly where the routine breaks, repair or rebuild it, steady the devices it depends on, and leave your automations running reliably again. With 30+ years of professional experience, untangling routines is one of my favorite visits — because the house starts behaving the way you meant it to.

- A routine stopped and you can't tell which part is failing.

- Several routines broke at once, perhaps after a change.
- A routine works some days and not others.
- You'd simply rather have your automations rebuilt to last.

CHEAT SHEET

Everyday Cheat Sheet

Keep this handy. Find the one piece that broke.

I want to...	Do this...
Find the break fast	Run the routine manually and watch which action fails
Fix the common cause	Re-point any action aimed at a renamed or re-added device
Fix a routine that won't start	Check the trigger — time, phrase, or sensor — is still set and firing
Fix one failing action	Confirm that device is online; fix its connection first
Fix a whole brand's actions	Re-link that brand's skill or account, then re-point the routine
Fix a stubborn routine	Note what it does, delete it, and rebuild it fresh
Get help	Call Bill: (330) 200-8042

BEFORE YOU GO

A Note From Bill

A quick note from Bill. I write these guides to make home tech a little less frustrating, and I do my best to keep every step accurate and up to date. Still, every home, device, and setup is a bit different, so I can't promise a guide will match yours exactly or fix your particular problem. These guides are for general information only — they're not professional, legal, or financial advice, and they don't replace your device's own manual or the manufacturer's instructions. Please go slow, use your own good judgment, and use everything here at your own risk. If a step involves electrical wiring, a gas appliance, a water heater, plumbing, or climbing a ladder — or if anything just doesn't feel safe — please stop and call a licensed professional (or give me a call at 330-200-8042). Bill's Home Tech and Bill Davis can't be responsible for any damage, data loss, or injury that results.

HOW I CAN HELP

Your Visit — and My Promise

You don't have to remember all of it — just that a friendly, patient person is one call away, whenever you'd rather have a hand.

KEY SPECS

In your home — $99 flat for the first visit, no contracts and no surprises, with a 30-day come-back-free follow-up. In-home visits cover Portage County, Ohio and nearby communities.
Outside the area? Remotely — $49 for a screen-share session (free for Support Plan members, $39/mo), refundable if I can't fix it — and credited toward a visit if you'd rather have me in person. Book either at billshometech.com/book.

GOOD TO KNOW

My promise — If you're not 100% satisfied with your visit, I'll come back at no charge, or refund the full $99. No questions, no awkwardness. That's how I'd want to be treated.

Whenever you're ready, I'll come to your home anywhere in Portage County, Ohio and nearby communities, at your pace. Too far for a house call? I also help remotely. Book at billshometech.com/book or call (330) 200-8042. — Bill

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