



An Extended Guide · No. 1862

Video Intercoms & Door Buzzers — Seeing Who's There Before You Unlock

The plain difference between a
buzzer, a doorbell, and a door station

Tech Made Simple — Service Made Personal

BillsHomeTech.com · (330) 200-8042 · Atwater, Ohio

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! Read this first — it's about people, not just pictures

Before the gear, a word that matters more than any camera: with a business you are recording other people — customers, staff, people walking by — so where you point a camera, and whether it picks up sound, is as important as the picture. As a rule, keep cameras on general work and public areas, never on restrooms, changing areas, or anywhere someone expects privacy, and be very careful about recording audio. This guide gives you plain-English general information, not legal advice. For your own situation — especially anything to do with employees, audio, or the law — check with an attorney who knows Ohio. A door station that sees and hears your visitors is still a camera and a microphone — so point it at the doorway and the approach, not into a neighbor's space, and be thoughtful about the sound it records.

See who's there before you unlock the door

A video intercom is a simple idea with a big payoff: before you let anyone through a locked door, you can see their face and talk to them from where you're standing — or from your phone across town. This guide shows you the plain choices so you buy the right thing once.

I'm Bill, and I run Bill's Home Tech here in Portage County, Ohio. I've spent 30+ years helping folks get comfortable with the technology around their homes and businesses, patiently and in plain language. A locked door you can't see through is a daily little worry; a good intercom takes it away.

There's no single 'right' intercom — only the one that fits your door, your staff, and how people actually arrive. So we'll start with what you need: a shop with a buzzed-in front, a back delivery door nobody watches, or an after-hours office where one person is alone.

★ A quick question beats a wrong purchase

Intercoms are one of those things where the box on the shelf doesn't tell you what you really need to know. Call or text me at (330) 200-8042 and describe your door — I'll tell you which of the three kinds fits, free, with nothing to sell you.

The whole guide, on one page

If you remember only these things, you'll pick the right door station and avoid the common regrets.

- ❑ An intercom lets you SEE and TALK to someone at a locked door before you buzz them in.
- ❑ There are three kinds: a plain audio buzzer, a video doorbell, and a wired video door station — and they're not the same job.
- ❑ It can ring to a dedicated indoor station, to staff phones, or both, so someone can answer from anywhere.
- ❑ To actually unlock the door it pairs with an electric door release — that needs power and usually a pro to fit the door hardware.
- ❑ Never set anything up that stops a fire-exit door from opening from the inside — that's a life-safety line you don't cross.
- ❑ Plan it alongside your door-access and camera plan, not as a lonely gadget on one door.

✓ One rule to hold onto

An intercom's whole value is the moment before you unlock. If you can't clearly see the face and hear the voice at your door, you're buzzing people in blind — so put your money into a clear picture and clear sound first.

What a video intercom actually does

Strip away the marketing and a door station does three plain things. Keep them in mind and the choices get simple.

It lets you see

A small camera at the door shows you the person standing there — their face, their hands, whether they're alone, whether they're really the delivery driver they say they are. You get this look before the door ever opens.

It lets you talk

A speaker and microphone let you have a two-way word with the visitor without opening up — 'be right there', 'deliveries around the back', 'we're closed, can I help you?'. Most of the time that conversation settles things on its own.

It lets you unlock — on your terms

When you're satisfied, a button releases the door so they can come in. The seeing and talking are the intercom; the unlocking is a separate piece of door hardware we'll come to. Keeping those two ideas apart saves a lot of confusion.

✓ The picture and the sound both matter

People shop for the camera and forget the sound. A door station you can see but barely hear is half a tool. Make sure whatever you pick is clear both ways — you looking out and them hearing you.

The three kinds, and which is which

Almost everything sold as a 'door intercom' is one of these three. They look similar in a catalog but do quite different jobs.

A **simple audio buzzer** is the old standby: a button outside, a speaker inside, and a buzzer to unlock. You hear a voice but see nothing. Fine for a known, low-traffic door, but you're trusting your ears alone.

A **video doorbell** is the consumer gadget many of us know from home: it sees and talks, rings to a phone, and is easy to put up. For a business it can work on a light-use door, but it's built around one household, leans on Wi-Fi and often a subscription, and isn't really made to buzz open a commercial door.

A **wired video door station** is the business-grade choice: a sturdy outdoor unit wired back to power and to an indoor station and/or your phones, built to pair with a proper electric door release. It costs and installs like real equipment, but it's the one made for a shop door that gets used all day.

Type	You see?	Best for
Audio buzzer	No, hear only	A known, quiet door
Video doorbell	Yes	A light-use entry
Wired door station	Yes	A busy business door

★ **Don't let the price tag pick for you**

The cheapest box is tempting, but the wrong kind on a busy door is money wasted twice. Tell me how the door gets used and I'll point you to the kind that fits — call (330) 200-8042.

Seeing and talking before you unlock

This is the heart of it. The few seconds between the knock and the unlock are where an intercom earns its keep.

When someone comes to a locked door, the intercom chimes. You look at the screen — or your phone — and see who's there. You press to talk, ask what they need, and listen. Only when you're comfortable do you press to unlock. If something feels off, you simply don't, and you've risked nothing.

That little pause is powerful for a small business. It stops the stranger who follows a customer in, lets you steer a delivery to the right door, and means a lone staffer never has to open a door to find out who's on the other side. It also pairs naturally with your cameras — the door station sees the face up close while a wider camera catches the whole approach. We cover that wider coverage in the entrances guide.

! An intercom is not a lock by itself

Seeing and talking is only half the job. If the door doesn't actually lock, or the release can be forced, the nicest screen in the world won't keep anyone out. Plan the intercom and a solid locked door together.

Where it rings — an indoor station, phones, or both

Half of getting an intercom right is deciding where the call lands when someone's at the door. You have three sensible patterns.

To a dedicated indoor station

A small screen mounted inside — at the counter, the office, the back bench — chimes and shows the door. It's always on, always in the same spot, and anyone working can glance at it. Steady and simple, with nothing to unlock on a phone.

To staff phones

The door call rings an app on one or more phones, so you can answer from the stockroom, the far end of the shop, or even from home after hours. Wonderful for a one-person operation or a back door you can't always stand near.

To both

Many business door stations do both at once — the indoor screen for whoever's at the counter and phones for whoever's roaming. For a lot of shops that's the sweet spot. If answering from a phone matters to you, see the guides on viewing from your phone and on after-hours alerts.

✓ Decide who answers before you buy

The best setup depends on who's usually near the door. One person alone wants it on the phone; a counter with staff wants an indoor screen. Picture a normal busy afternoon and ask 'who hears the chime, and where are they?'

Pairing with an electric door release

The part that actually opens the door is separate hardware — and it's the part where a pro usually earns their fee.

To buzz a door open, the intercom sends a signal to an **electric door release** — commonly an electric strike or a maglock fitted into or beside the door frame. Press the unlock button and it releases the latch so the visitor can pull the door open. When it lets go, the door locks again on its own.

That hardware needs its own power, and it has to be matched to your actual door and frame — a glass storefront door, a steel back door, and a wooden office door all want different fittings. This is real door work, usually for a locksmith or a low-voltage pro, not a weekend project. Get it wrong and the door either won't lock or won't open.

Because the door release ties into the whole question of who may open which door and when, it overlaps heavily with electronic door access. If you're thinking about key fobs or codes as well, read the door-access guide alongside this one — the two often get installed together.

★ I'll set up the brains and line up the brawn

I'm a tech helper, not a licensed locksmith or low-voltage contractor. I'm glad to plan the intercom, get it talking to your phones, and make it all work together — and for fitting the door release I'll help you line up a trustworthy local pro. Call (330) 200-8042.

The one rule you never bend: the fire exit

An intercom controls who gets IN. It must never, ever make it harder for someone to get OUT.

A door that people use to leave the building has to open from the inside, instantly, by hand, even if the power is out, the internet is down, or the whole system has failed. That's not a preference — it's life safety and fire code. No intercom, lock, or release may defeat it.

This matters most with a maglock or any strong electric lock on an exit door. These must be fitted so that they let go the moment someone needs to leave, and so a power failure doesn't trap anyone inside. That's exactly why the door hardware belongs with a pro who knows the fire code for your building — defer to them, and to your local fire authority, every time.

! Never trade an exit for security

If any setup would make it slower or harder to get out of the building in an emergency, stop. The right answer is always a design that keeps people safe on the way out while still controlling who comes in — a pro can do both. When in doubt, ask the fire authority before you install.

The doors where an intercom really pays off

An intercom isn't for every door. It shines in a few specific spots that almost every small business has.

- **A locked front entry.** A shop or studio that buzzes customers in one at a time — jewelry, a salon, a by-appointment office — gets to see each person first.
- **A back delivery door.** The door nobody can see from the counter. An intercom lets you check and steer a driver without walking back and opening up blind.
- **An after-hours office.** When one person is working late, seeing and talking to a visitor before unlocking is real peace of mind.
- **A tenant or suite door.** An upstairs office or a unit off a shared hallway, where you want to greet visitors before they reach you.

Notice the pattern: these are all doors that are normally locked and where you can't just glance over to see who's knocking. If a door is propped open all day with staff right there, an intercom adds little. Spend where the door is locked and out of sight.

✓ Match the kind to the door

A quiet after-hours office might be happy with a video doorbell to a phone. A storefront buzzing people in all day wants a wired door station. The door that gets the most use deserves the sturdier equipment.

Two kinds of businesses, two sets of needs

How you'd use a door intercom depends a lot on whether strangers come to your door all day or only now and then. The two look quite different.

If you run a customer-facing shop or storefront

People you don't know come to your door constantly, and you may buzz them in one at a time. You want a clear look at each face, quick two-way talk, and a release you can press from the counter in a second.

- Lean toward a wired video door station built for steady daily use.
- Ring it to an indoor screen at the counter where staff always are.
- Pair it with a solid locked door and a proper electric release.
- Place the camera to catch the face in good light, not a backlit shape.

If you run an office, warehouse, or back-of-house

Fewer visitors, but often a back door out of sight and staff who roam or work alone. You care most about answering from wherever you are and never opening a door blind.

- Ring the door call to phones so a roaming or lone staffer can answer.
- Put a station on the unwatched delivery or loading door first.
- Think it through with door access — who may open which door, and when.
- For a late-working office, pair it with the after-hours alerts guide.

★ Not sure which fits your door?

Plenty of places are a bit of both — a shop out front and a quiet back dock behind. Tell me how each door gets used and who's usually near it, and I'll help you pick the right intercom for each. Call (330) 200-8042.

Power, wiring, and what runs where

A door station is more than the box on the wall. Knowing the pieces up front keeps the install from stalling.

A wired door station typically needs a cable run from the outdoor unit back to power and to wherever it rings — the indoor station, your network, or both. A separate feed powers the electric door release. None of it is especially exotic, but it is real low-voltage wiring, and the runs have length limits just like camera cabling.

A video doorbell is simpler — it often leans on existing doorbell wiring or a battery and your Wi-Fi — which is exactly why it's easier to put up and also why it's less suited to a door that must lock and unlock reliably all day. A simple audio buzzer is the least wiring of all, but it gives you no picture.

✓ Plan the wire before you fall for a spot

The perfect screen location that's a long pull through a finished wall can cost more than the intercom. When you plan, picture the cable getting from the door to the screen to the power — it often nudges you to an easier, nearly-as-good spot.

How it fits with door access and your cameras

An intercom rarely lives alone. It's one piece of how people get through your doors, and it works best planned with the rest.

Think of three overlapping jobs at a door: an **intercom** lets you see and talk to a visitor and buzz them in; **door access** (fobs, cards, codes) lets known people let themselves in without bothering you; and **cameras** keep the record of who came and went. Many good setups use all three on the same busy door.

The reason to plan them together is the door release. Both the intercom and a door-access system release the same lock, often share the same power, and must respect the same fire-exit rules. Install them as one project and it's tidy; bolt them on one at a time and you can end up with a mess at the frame. The door-access guide goes deep on the access side; the entrances guide covers aiming the cameras.

★ Let's map the whole door at once

If you're adding an intercom and thinking about fobs or codes too, let's plan the door as a whole so it all shares one tidy setup. Tell me about the door and I'll sketch it with you. Call (330) 200-8042.

Answering from your phone and after hours

One of the quiet joys of a modern door station is answering a visitor when you're nowhere near the door — but do it with your eyes open.

When the door call reaches your phone, you can see and speak to a visitor from the back room, from the road, or from the couch. For a delivery you weren't expecting, or a knock after closing, that's genuinely useful — you learn who's there without ever exposing yourself at the door.

A word of care: buzzing a door open from miles away means you're letting someone into an empty or half-empty building. That's fine for a known, scheduled visitor and risky for a stranger. And because the door call travels over your network and an app, set it up the safe way — see the guides on viewing from your phone and on passwords and updates, and the after-hours alerts guide for handling knocks when you're closed.

! Think twice before a remote unlock

Seeing and talking from your phone is almost always safe. Actually releasing the door from afar is a bigger step — only do it for someone you know and expect. When you're not sure, leave it locked and sort it out in person or by a call.

Do it yourself, or bring in a pro?

Be honest about which parts you can handle. The intercom and the door hardware are two very different jobs.

Setting up the intercom's app, getting it to ring your phone, and mounting a tidy indoor screen are well within a handy owner's reach — and they're exactly the kind of thing I help with. A plug-in video doorbell is about as easy as it gets.

The electric door release is a different animal. Fitting a strike or maglock into a real door and frame, wiring it for power, and making absolutely sure the exit stays safe is work for a locksmith or low-voltage pro. There's no shame in splitting the job: let a pro do the door, and let me do the brains and your phone. The installer guide walks through how to pick and question a pro.

★ I do the setup, a pro does the door

I'll plan the intercom, set up the app and the ringing, and make the whole thing make sense — then help you line up a trustworthy local pro for the door release and confirm it all works together. One call to start: (330) 200-8042.

Placement, light, and hearing clearly

A door station only helps if you can actually see the face and hear the voice. A few placement habits make all the difference.

Mount the camera so it catches a person's face at a sensible height, not the top of their head or a backlit shape. A unit staring into the afternoon sun or a bright sky turns every visitor into a dark silhouette — the same backlight trap we warn about with cameras. If you can, point it so the light falls on the visitor, not behind them.

Outdoors, the unit has to shrug off rain, snow, and sun, so pick one rated for the weather and tuck it under an eave or awning if you can. And test the sound both ways before you rely on it — stand at the door while a helper listens inside, then swap. A door station you can see but not hear is only half installed.

✓ Stand at your door at the brightest hour

Before you settle on a spot, go stand where the visitor will stand at the sunniest time of day and notice where the light is. Thirty seconds there saves you from a camera that only ever shows a dark shape.

Keeping it private and secure

A door station is a camera and a microphone on the front of your building. A little care keeps it on the right side of people's privacy.

Aim it at your own doorway and the approach to it, not across the street into a neighbor's window or a public sidewalk any more than you need. Because a door station usually records sound as well as picture, be mindful: recording audio carries its own rules in Ohio, and a visitor's words are being captured. When in doubt, keep the setup focused on your own threshold.

On the security side, a door station lives on your network and often answers to a phone app, so it deserves the same care as any connected camera — a strong, unique password, the maker's updates kept current, and no risky holes poked in your router. The guide on passwords and updates covers the habits; the audio-recording guide covers the Ohio rules.

! A quick word on audio and the law

Ohio has specific rules about recording conversations, and a video door station often records sound as well as picture. Keeping the unit aimed at your own entrance, and knowing whether it's capturing audio, keeps you well clear of trouble. This is general information, not legal advice; rules change and every situation is different, so confirm the specifics with an attorney who knows Ohio before you rely on it.

A simple planning checklist

Walk your door with this list before you buy. Settle each point and you'll have a real plan, not a guess.

- ☐ I know which door this is for and how it actually gets used.
- ☐ I've picked the kind: audio buzzer, video doorbell, or wired station.
- ☐ I've decided where it rings — indoor screen, phones, or both.
- ☐ I know whether I need an electric door release, and who'll fit it.
- ☐ I've confirmed the door is or will be a properly locked door.
- ☐ I've made sure nothing stops the door opening from inside in an emergency.
- ☐ I've checked the light at the door and picked a spot that sees faces.
- ☐ I've planned it alongside my door access and cameras, not alone.

✓ Photograph your door and your notes

Snap a photo of the door, the frame, and your filled-in list before you talk to any vendor or installer. It keeps the conversation about your door, not their catalog — and you can text it to me for a second opinion.

Common mistakes people make

A handful of avoidable slip-ups cause most intercom regret. Now you'll see them coming.

- **Buying a home video doorbell** for a busy commercial door it was never built to lock and unlock all day.
- **Forgetting the door release** — buying the screen and finding the door still can't actually be buzzed open.
- **Ignoring who answers**, so the chime rings where nobody is standing when a visitor arrives.
- **Pointing it into the light**, turning every visitor into a dark silhouette.
- **Compromising the fire exit** — the one mistake that's never worth it, and a job for a pro.
- **Setting it up carelessly on the network**, with a weak password and no updates.

! The expensive mistake

Most of these cost you a little money or a redo. Defeating a fire exit can cost someone their safety and you a world of liability. Keep the exit sacred and let a pro handle the lock.

Questions to ask before you buy or install

Whether you're talking to a vendor, an installer, or to me, these questions steer you to the right door station.

Q: Is this built for a commercial door, or is it a home gadget?

A busy locked business door wants a wired door station made for daily use. A home video doorbell can suit a light-use or after-hours door, but say plainly how the door gets used and let the answer fit that.

Q: Where will the call ring, and can it reach my phone?

You want to know up front whether it rings an indoor screen, phones, or both, and whether answering from a phone needs a subscription. Decide who's usually near the door and match it.

Q: What's needed to actually unlock the door, and who fits it?

The intercom and the electric release are separate. Make sure the quote includes a release matched to your door and frame, fitted by someone who knows the fire code — not just the screen.

Q: Will the exit still open freely from inside, no matter what?

The answer must be an unqualified yes. If the person waves off this question, that's a reason to find a different installer, not to buy.

✓ There's no silly question

If a salesperson rushes you or makes you feel foolish for asking how the door stays safe, walk away. A plain answer to a plain question is the least you should expect for a door people pass through.

Choosing between the three

Pull it together and the decision usually makes itself once you're honest about the door.

If the door is quiet and known — a back office you rarely answer — a **simple audio buzzer** may be all you need, though you'll be trusting your ears. If it's a light-use entry and you mostly want to see and talk from your phone, a **video doorbell** is easy and inexpensive, within its limits.

If it's a real business door that gets used all day and must lock and unlock reliably, a **wired video door station** is worth the extra cost and install. Buying down to a home gadget on a door like that is the most common regret I see. Match the equipment to how hard the door works.

★ I'll help you choose without overbuying

I don't sell intercoms and earn no commission, so my advice is just advice. Describe your door and I'll tell you honestly which of the three fits — and when the cheaper one is plenty. Call (330) 200-8042.

Common Questions

The questions I hear most from owners weighing a door intercom, answered plainly.

Q: Can I just use a home video doorbell for my shop?

For a light-use or after-hours door, often yes. For a busy door you buzz people through all day, no — those are built around one household and aren't made to lock and unlock a commercial door reliably. Match the tool to how hard the door works.

Q: Does an intercom lock the door by itself?

No. The intercom lets you see, talk, and send the unlock signal. The locking and unlocking is a separate electric door release, usually fitted by a pro. Plan them together — the door-access guide covers the release side in depth.

Q: Can I answer the door from my phone?

Most modern door stations can ring your phone so you can see and talk from anywhere. Actually buzzing the door open from afar is best saved for visitors you know and expect. See the phone-viewing and after-hours-alerts guides.

Q: Is it safe to put a maglock on my exit door?

Only if it's fitted so the door still opens freely from inside in any emergency, power out or not — that's fire-code territory. This is exactly why the door hardware belongs with a pro who knows your local code. Never defeat an exit.

★ Still weighing it up?

Door intercoms are one of those things that seem fiddly until someone walks you through the three choices plainly. That's me. Call or text (330) 200-8042 and let's figure out the right one for your door.

You don't have to do this alone

You just have to remember that a friendly, patient person is one call away.

I hope this guide made choosing and setting up a door intercom feel a little less daunting and a lot more doable. Keep it with your other business papers, come back to a page whenever you need it, and don't worry about memorizing anything — that's what the guide is for.

When you'd rather have a hand, that's exactly what I do. I come to your place of business, work at your pace, and never make you feel rushed or silly for asking. A first visit is a flat \$99, and for the parts that don't need me on-site I can often help right on your screen for \$49. Every visit comes with a 30-day, come-back-free guarantee. I'm a tech helper, not a licensed electrician or low-voltage contractor — for in-wall wiring or panel work I'll help you line up a trustworthy local pro and make sure it all works together.

★ Bill's Home Tech — real help, close to home

Call or text me at (330) 200-8042, or visit BillsHomeTech.com. Serving Atwater and all of Portage County. 30+ years of patient, plain-English tech help — and if you're ever not 100% happy with a visit, I'll make it right or refund it. That's a promise. — Bill

The Three Kinds of Door Intercom

They look alike in a catalog but do different jobs

	Do you see?	Best for
Audio buzzer	Hear only	A quiet door
Video doorbell	Yes	Light-use entry
Wired station	Yes	Busy shop door

Match the equipment to how hard the door actually works.

How a Door Call Works

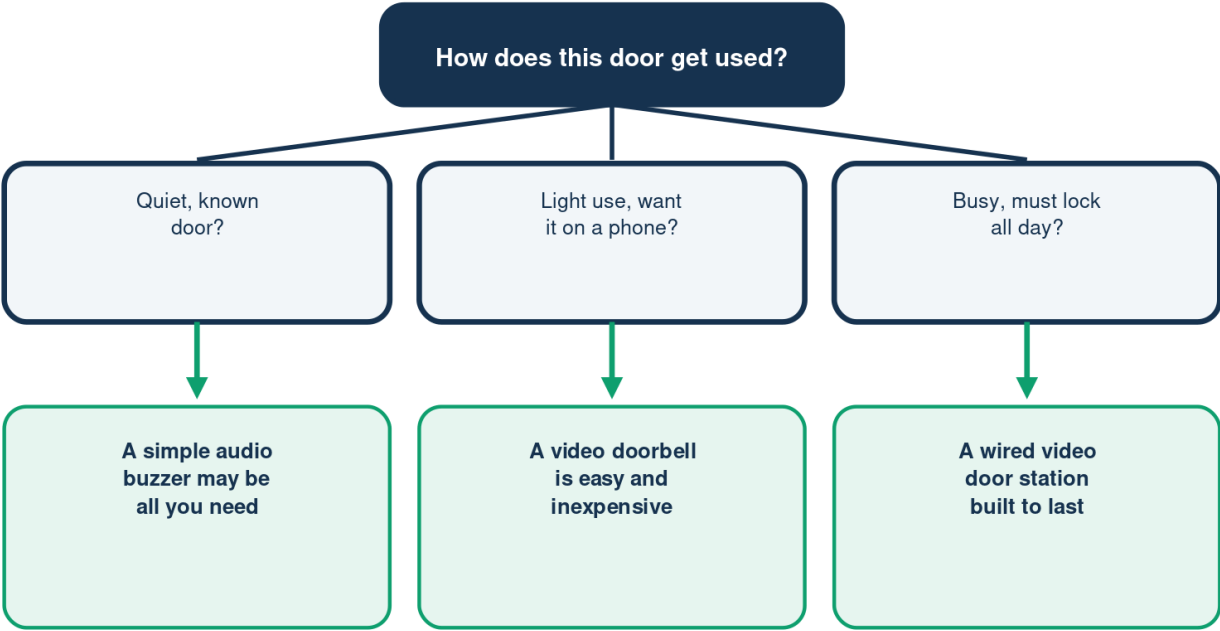
The few seconds before you unlock are the whole point



If something feels off, you simply don't unlock -- no risk taken.

Which Intercom for This Door?

Be honest about how the door gets used



Never fit a lock or release that defeats a fire exit – use a pro.

Illustration - a schematic, not to scale. Your setup may differ.

Where Should It Ring?

Decide who answers before you buy

	Rings to	Good when
Indoor screen	Counter / office	Staff always near
Staff phones	Anywhere	You roam or work alone
Both at once	Screen + phones	A mix of both

Picture a busy afternoon: who hears the chime, and where are they?



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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 comes from using these guides. Thanks for reading, and stay safe out there.

— *Bill*



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