

Why is there the message '!Do not use this registry key' in the registry?

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Under `Software\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\Explorer\Shell Folders`, there is a message to registry snoopers: The first value is called “!Do not use this registry key” and the associated data is the message “Use the SHGetFolderPath or SHGetKnownFolderPath function instead.” I added that message. [The long and sad story of the Shell Folders key](#) explains that the registry key exists only to retain backward compatibility with four programs written in 1994. There’s also [a TechNet version of the article](#) which is just as sad but not as long. One customer saw this message and complained, “That registry key and that TechNet article explain how to *obtain* the current locations of those special folders, but they don’t explain how to *change* them. This type of woefully inadequate documentation only makes the problem worse.” Hey, wow, a little message in a registry key and a magazine article are now “documentation”! The TechNet article is historical background. And the registry key is just a gentle nudge. Neither is documentation. It’s not like I’m going to put a complete copy of the documentation into a registry key. Documentation lives in places like MSDN. But it seems that some people need more than a nudge; they need a shove. Let’s see, we’re told that the functions for obtaining the locations of known folders are `SHGetFolderPath` and its more modern counterpart `SHGetKnownFolderPath`. I wonder what the names of the functions for modifying those locations might be? Man that’s a tough one. I’ll let you puzzle that out for a while. Okay, here, I’ll tell you: The corresponding functions go by the completely unobvious names `SHSetFolderPath` and `SHSetKnownFolderPath`.

Sorry you had to use your brain. I’ll let you get back to programming now.

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