

# CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

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## Out of Focus

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By Douglas E. Welch

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Among everything else I do, I am also an amateur artist. As is often the case, something you learn in one area can often be useful in other aspects of your life. One useful technique I have learned from my art is squinting. When you are first looking at a scene you want to draw or paint, you purposefully unfocus your vision in order to get an overall impression of the light and dark areas. Sometimes, in order to see things more clearly, you have to get the big picture first.

### Looking Around

If you've been working in high-tech for even a short while, you have probably faced a situation where you didn't have the whole picture. Oftentimes, your client will come to you with a specific request for software or a procedure without giving you any background on the challenge he or she is trying to solve. Despite my inherent desire to jump right in and start offering solutions, I have to remind myself to step back and gain some prospective first. I have to "squint" at the problem to see if there are underlying issues that the user does not see from his or her perspective.

I know from my own experience that if I don't do this, I can waste time solving the wrong problem. This can often lead to great misunderstandings with both clients and/or managers. You may have thought you solved the problem, only to realize that it wasn't the true problem, after all.

### What Are You Looking For?

So what am I looking for when I'm out with my sketchpad? How does squinting help? First, it reduces the amount of data I have to process. Instead of seeing hundreds of trees and thousands of leaves, I see blobs of color, sections of light and dark. Instead of being overwhelmed with data, I can see the big picture. It may have become a cliché, but squinting truly allows me to see the forest for the trees. Once I block in these large, general areas with my pencil, I can then begin looking at specifics, no longer mesmerized by the sheer complexity of the scene before me.

You can apply this process to your high-tech work, too. When you are presented with a din of confusing and often contradictory details, look for more general causes for the problems.

Are your online forms too complex, or is your system operating too slowly? What is the real reason your users aren't using the new database? Is it a technology issue, training issue or, worse still, a political issue? It will do you no good to address technology issues when the true cause lies in corporate infighting. Always make sure you are solving the right problem.

### At Your Own Pace

As with all troubleshooting, you often need time to analyze a problem, but those around you will be clamoring for immediate answers to their questions. In order to do your best work, though, you need time to think. You should always take a few minutes to "squint" at the problem, to consider it from several different angles, before diving in.

If my experience is any indication, taking this time can be quite difficult. You may find yourself under a lot of pressure to "react" to a situation. I can guarantee, though, that your best work will come only from calm consideration, not immediate reaction. Step away for a few minutes to "visit the bathroom" or get a drink of water. Take a short walk around the office to give yourself a few minutes of consideration. Do whatever you need to gain perspective on the issue before saying anything. Too often, words spoken in haste can come back to haunt you.

Doing the best work you can relies largely on your ability to analyze a situation and find the underlying issues instead of being distracted by superficialities. Take a cue from the artists of the world and "squint" at the scene before committing to a plan of action. Both you and your client will greatly benefit from this consideration and thought. It will allow you to develop better solutions with less wasted efforts than ever before. This is sure to increase your value to your clients and further enhance your high-tech career. □

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## HELP WANTED

■ **MANAGER, HEALTH INFORMATION SYSTEM**—Looking for experienced manager of a health information database. Duties include managing an Access database, analysis and reporting of health data, quality management, and conceptual systems design. Need knowledge of health information technologies, system design, and basic Access programming. Please fax cover letter and resume to Michelle Salmon, 858-626-5680 or e-mail to [salmon.michelle@scrippshealth.org](mailto:salmon.michelle@scrippshealth.org).

## POSITIONS WANTED

■ **SOFTWARE DEVELOPER/TESTER** for hire! I have eleven years of UNIX/Windows experience and I am a good worker at a fair price. E-mail [cmarvel@nethere.com](mailto:cmarvel@nethere.com).