

CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

Here It Comes Again

By Douglas E. Welch

Despite the fact that your job may seem like a chaotic jumble of unforeseeable events, there are certain recurring ones that directly impact your ability to do your job. Managing these events can be a way to exercise some control over your day-to-day work, opening holes of time in which to deal with the unforeseen problems that always arise. Take some time, today, to look into the near future and start planning for some of your recurring events.

Crunch Time

Every business has certain “crunch times” of the year. For retailers, it is the Christmas season. For other businesses, it can be the end of the month or the quarter. Perhaps you have a major project review that occurs the same time every year. Whatever the cause, you need to note these crunch times in your personal calendar, project schedule, and anywhere else it makes sense.

Crunch times can bring a combination of frustration, fear, elation, pride, and nearly every other emotion you can imagine. It can also bring system failures, insufficient resources and lost or damaged data. During these times, you want to ensure that every system is operating at the peak of efficiency. If you have been having problems with something, fix it before it fails in the middle of a crisis. Perhaps you need to bring in more servers to handle the workload. Maybe there are never enough printers to output the stacks of reports that are necessary. Do you need more hard disk space? Get it, install it, and test it now.

Focusing on your preparations not only gives you some peace of mind, it will allow you to react more quickly to those crises that do occur. If you aren't worrying about babysitting a fragile Web server, you can be dealing with user-related problems immediately, before they turn into much larger problems. If you have arranged for more than enough printers, the failure of one won't have a large impact on work as a whole. It may seem like a Boy Scout cliché, but “be prepared” should be your motto in all aspects of your career.

Action Plans

Here is how to develop your action plan, starting today. What is the next major business event your com-

pany has to deal with? Is accounting closing the quarterly books or filing taxes? Are everyone's status reports due at the end of the month? You may not have taken much notice of events like this in the past, except when they directly impacted you. You need to change your thinking. Every major business event can and will affect your high-tech work. Technology is deeply integrated into every aspect of most companies, so even the most obscure site inspection or product test could end up causing you a lot of trouble.

Start marking any and all events in your calendar. In most cases, they will fall at regular intervals on the calendar so you may be able to schedule them as repeating items. Next, think about the lead-time you may need to prepare for each event. Place a reminder so many days or weeks ahead of the event as your own personal reminder. “Oh yeah,” you might say. “I need to make sure that all the systems are upgraded well before the project demos.” Placing these reminders in a trusted system, and out of your already cluttered brain, will help to ensure that events aren't forgotten, only to surprise you at a later date.

As you start to develop your calendar of business events, you will naturally develop procedures to deal with them. After a few months, each instance may require no more than a quick check that the procedures are still correct and functional, instead of a mad dash to deal with them. Over time, you will become aware of more and more recurring events and handle them in the same fashion. Over time, you will find that less of your attention will be required for these events, freeing more of your attention for unforeseen crises and, better yet, more challenging and rewarding projects.

Take time today to step back and begin dealing with recurring business events instead of letting them control your schedule and your work. These events are foreseeable, and anything you can do to manage them will free time and energy for more pressing and rewarding work. This will mean that you can look toward building your high-tech career instead of having it rocked on the chaotic seas of your day-to-day high-tech life. □

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