

CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

A New Chance

By Douglas E. Welch

Every time the calendar rolls around to a new year, it is your opportunity for a fresh start. While New Year's resolutions are much ridiculed, the concept is still sound. Take the time to evaluate the past year and make plans for the next. You may not keep your resolutions, or plans may fall short of your expectations, but the power is in trying.

The New Year is a great time to look at each and every process, program, and procedure and think about how it can be made better or removed entirely. Too often companies hold on to outdated procedures and outmoded thinking that makes it harder for their employees to do their work. These "millstones" drag down the efforts of everyone involved and can dangerously affect the profitability of a company.

Look around you. What millstones are your clients carrying around their necks? Do they have to fill out acres of forms to get a PC for a new hire? Are they waiting weeks for an appointment to fix their failing monitor? Are they adrift without training or guidance in how to productively use their technology?

You may be surprised by just how grateful your clients can be when you raise a heavy weight from their shoulders. Doing just a few small things well can help to turn around bad perceptions about your service and start to turn bad relationships into something more positive.

Next, check your own neck. What technological millstones are you carrying? Has your backup system turned into a nightmare that may or may not be protecting your data? Are you a one-person support team for 100 people? Are you playing the "cobbler's child" with no technological shoes on your feet? Now is the time to identify your heaviest millstones and develop a plan to address them. Spend a few minutes and gather your research, prepare your justifications, and then schedule some time with management. Do it now. Do it before management can get wound up in the new and continuing problems of the next year, and the next, and the next. If you don't address the problems now, you may not get a real chance.

Dedicate Yourself to Continual Learning

In the interest of improving both your current job and your future job prospects, you must adopt a conscious program of renewal. It is far too easy to become comfortable with a particular system or technology over time. Unless you are actively engaging new technology all the time, there is a danger of

marginalizing your skills and limiting your possibilities.

Furthermore, nothing is more dangerous than a high-tech worker with knowledge of only a few technologies. Like the child with a hammer, every problem will start to look like a nail. Using the wrong technology is bad enough, but using the wrong technology on the wrong problem can be disastrous. Develop your knowledge to the fullest and you can avoid many problems.

This learning can take many forms. Read current magazines and newsletters. Follow online Web sites and newsgroups. Join a local technology user group. It matters less how you build your knowledge than that you are building it. You can't rely on others to help you with your education. If your company isn't offering training classes, get the training yourself. If you don't know anything about a particular system, take the initiative to find out. Don't know how to perform a particular function? Find someone to help you, online or off.

Tell the Truth

Finally, the most important task for the coming year is to speak the truth, both professionally and personally. This goes far beyond simply not lying outright. I am speaking of those situations where you don't tell the truth, to your clients and yourself, in order to avoid conflict or risk.

If you don't agree with your manager's decision, don't nod your head and secretly harbor a grudge. Talk to him or her, in diplomatic ways, and attempt to deal with the issue, instead of leaving it to fester and cause larger problems in the future. If you are not happy in your job, accept the truth of the situation and develop ways to make it better. Don't hide career problems from yourself thinking that retirement will bring you the time to pursue what you really want out of life. Imagine your disappointment when you realize you have wasted the best part of your life. □

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■ **.NET Developer**-Seeking unpaid internship. Masters Degree in Software Engineering. Former rep for Macromedia UltraDev. Active Server Pages, Visual Basic, C++, Java. LeRoy 619-286-4879 or e-mail medianuveau@netscape.net.