TITLE: "BRYCE'S PET PEEVES OF THE WEEK - PART II"

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Since 1971: *"Software for the finest computer - the Mind"*

"Never trust a person who doesn't have at least one known vice (e.g., drinking, smoking, swearing)."
- Bryce's Law

INTRODUCTION

This represents my second collection of "Pet Peeves" as derived from my weekly *"Management Visions"* (MV) Internet broadcast which is made available in MP3, WMA, and RealPlayer file formats. During the broadcast, I discuss subjects related to Information Resource Management (IRM), review upcoming events of interest, and review e-mails from listeners. I also describe my "Pet Peeve of the Week" which represents items irritating me at the moment.   This has turned into a popular part of the show and, as such, I am including them herein for those of you who missed the broadcast. Hopefully, you will be able to relate to some of these peeves. They are meant to offer some humorous insight into current topics of interest. I hope you will enjoy them.

You can "tune into" MV at:

http://www.phmainstreet.com/mba/mv.htm

JANUARY 2, 2006 - REALITY TV

I was fortunate to have grown up during the "Golden Age" of television. My kids find it amusing when I talk about black and white TV, no remote controls, only three or four stations to choose from, and that the stations signed off at about 1am only to be started again at 5:30 with the farm reports. Maybe it was beause there were only three or four channels that we enjoyed some of the best programming of all time as only the cream of the crop made it to the small screen; programs that have been converted into the movies of today.

As we all know, today we have dozens of channels and a real void in creative programming. There are plenty of stations now with movies; specialty stations for sports, news, food, history and home improvement; heck, there is even a few that specialize in re-runs. The major networks primarily offer police dramas and some lame sitcoms. But their real "bread and butter" for the major networks are the "reality" shows that have been popping up over the last five years; shows such as *Survivor, Fear Factor, The Apprentice*, and *American Idol*. The ratings on these shows are impressive but you have to ask yourself why.

Evidently, viewers like to observe human behaviour in seemingly real-life situations. In actuality, these are all rigged situations that are well choreographed for dramatic effect. In other words, these shows have as much to do with reality as a comic book does. If the public honestly has a fascination with reality TV, why don't we give them some true-to-life exposes. How about life on death-row just before an execution? Or how about a soldier's life in Iraq or Afghanistan? How about following a bill through Congress? Or how about life in a real E.R.? I'm sure we could dream up dozens of such shows that would certainly be more educational and socially-redeeming. But this will never happen. The viewing public likes their reality TV sugar coated and turned into a game show. God forbid we should ever turn television from an entertainment vehicle to an educational one.

JANUARY 9, 2006 - CLOCK WATCHERS

As a follow-up to my essay on *"Craftsmanship,"* I have noticed that the younger workers today have a different orientation than their predecessors in the work place. Today, the typical worker pays more attention to the clock as opposed to what they produce during the day. This is driving managers from my generation crazy. For example, it is common to hear someone say, *"Boy, I worked hard today; I must have worked eight hours today with hardly any breaks."* That is most definitely what managers do not want to hear. Instead, they are interested in results. I don't care if you spent 24 hours working during the day; if you don't produce the product or service you are charged with, than it is all a colossal waste of time. The day a person starts to pay more attention to results, is the day when they lose track of time and start to solve meaningful problems.

Consider this, have you ever wondered why you don't see clocks in gambling casinos? Its because they want you concentrating on the job at hand. This is why I recommend to clients that they also remove clocks from the office, regardless if they are exempt or non-exempt workers. Time is irrelevant, results are where its at.

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JANUARY 16, 2006 - PROGRESS BARS...

You know, those annoying lines on your PC screen indicating that something is happening, like an upload or download, or the installation of a software package. I guess the idea is to demonstrate to you that something is actually happening on your machine and that you should be patient as it works. Gee, is it it just me or do you find these progress bars irritating as well? I always find it amusing when the progress bar runs rapidly through its completion rate of 25%, 50%, 75%, only to stop cold and get hung up at 99% with theoretically one second remaining to complete the task. That one second seems to take forever to complete. I think the worst offenders of such progress bars is Microsoft and AOL. Don't they have programmers who know how to calculate something as simple as completion times? I guess not. While the progress bar is running, how about entertaining us for awhile with either some multimedia presentation or some sort of text program. Knowing how long it takes to load Windows, I think *"War and Peace"* would be an easy read.

JANUARY 23, 2006 - HISTORY

As a kid I always enjoyed History class. I guess I always found it interesting to see how events were triggered and could have been prevented or altered. I guess this is why I like the History Channel so much. But this love of history is not being passed on to our youth. The schools seem to be obsessed with either teaching the basics of reading, writing and arithmetic or indoctrinating our youth with the latest technology. Consequently, topics such as Public Speaking and History have fallen by the wayside. I guess its more important to know how to make an MS PowerPoint presentation than to know how to effectively communicate with people or understand how Churchill forged an alliance with the United States in order to save freedom in Europe, or why Truman relieved MacArthur, and why we failed at the Bay of Pigs, etc. These are all important lessons, yet our youth learns nothing about them which is resulting in a generation with absolutely no sense of history.

Even more disturbing is that there is no sense of history in the corporate workplace either. Young people are not questioning their work environment or the evolution of their products and services anymore. This is very apparent in the Systems world. Let me give you some examples; programmers don't understand the evolution of programming languages, from the 1st GL (Machine Language), to 2nd GL (Assembly Language), to 3rd GL (Procedural Languages), and to 4th GL (Specification Lan-

guages). Nor are they aware of the evolution of design techniques, such as structured programming, and object oriented programming. Consequently, they do not properly understand the philosophy of programming. Nor do people understand how and why data base concepts evolved, such as the hierarchical model as used in IBM's IMS, to the CODASYL standard network model, to relational, and object oriented. For systems, they have no concept of the Systems and Procedures Departments of yesteryear with their process diagrams and techniques in work simplification, to the introduction of modern methodologies. But even more disturbing than all of this is the failure of management in Information Technology, whereas in yesteryear companies boldly tackled mammoth systems projects, today they are content with simple programming assignments.

In 2006 we are celebrating the 35th anniversary of the introduction of the "PRIDE" methodology. We have seen a lot over the last 35 years; we have seen a raft of methodologies come and go, we have seen numerous data dictionaries and repositories, CASE tools and countless application development aids (anyone remember AD/Cycle?) Interestingly, the problems we face today in I.T. are essentially no different than when "PRIDE" was first introduced in 1971 - Systems lack integration, we rarely share and reuse information resources, redundancy issues remain, nothing is documented, and projects are still late and over-budget. You would think that after 35 years, the industry would wise-up a little. Instead of trying to take a tool oriented approach to solving our problems, how about trying a management approach? As we all know, *"If we fail to learn from the past, we are doomed to repeat it."* The Information Technology industry will continue to struggle until such time as it standardizes their terms and applies a scientific method to solving their systems problems. All it takes is a little sense of history.

JANUARY 30, 2006 - AUTOMOTIVE REPAIRS

Recently, I had to replace the battery in my GMC Envoy. I haven't had to replace a car battery in quite some time. Back in the 1970's when I worked at a gas station on my summer vacation from school it used to take me about 5-10 minutes to replace a battery. But this time it took me at least an hour to undo the safety box and bar around the battery and undo the cables which were strategically placed in an awkward position to make it as difficult as possible to use a wrench to unscrew the posts. I just couldn't get over how the car manufacturers have complicated such a simple and mundane task as changing a battery. Small wonder the dealerships are charging us excessively for repair work.

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Another thing that bothers me is how the major automotive repair shops try to rip us off for excessive work. For example, I took my other car into a repair shop recently to have a headlight replaced. After the service shop looked it over, they called me with a long list of other items they wanted to replace, including shocks and tires. They were embarrassed when I told them I had both the shocks and the tires replaced just last year. As a consumer, I feel like I am being harvested every time I bring a car into these shops. Not only do they want to fix your immediate problem, but they go out of their way to find new ones. What bothers me is that many people fall for this old gag. What these service shops don't realize is that they are creating more distrust and suspicion than good service. It has taken me a long time to find a good mechanic that I trust and believe me, I have seen a lot of mechanics, most looking for nothing more than a quick buck. The guy I've got now knows his stuff and charges a fair price. And believe me, he is worth his weight in gold.

FEBRUARY 3, 2006 - TECHNOLOGY ADDICTION

In last week's State of the Union address, President Bush discussed the country's addiction to oil. He suggested the best way to solve our problem is through technology. And maybe he is right, but I tend to believe that technology is only a part of the equation, that if we possessed the proper management skills we could conquer just about anything. Let's take the space race of the 1960's as an example; true, it introduced a lot of technological innovations but more importantly, we devised a management program that laid out the program which led to man landing on the moon before the end of the decade. This program was every bit as ambitious, if not more so, than resolving our dependency on oil. Yet, it was conquered. But now I question our country's ability to accomplish anything of substance on a grand scale. Its not that we lack the technology; in fact, I think we have too much technology; that we have developed an infatuation or addiction to technology and, in the process, have lost the skills necessary to manage large projects.

Let me give you an example as it applies to systems development. Over the last 35 years, we've seen a plethora of tools and techniques introduced to help expedite the development of systems, all promising quantum leaps in productivity. We've seen many new programming languages introduced, data base management systems, data dictionaries and repositories, structured programming and object oriented programming, CASE tools, 4GLs, report writers and program generators, visual programming tools and programmer workbenches,

and so on. Today, we get excited about such things as Agile/Extreme programming. Yet, here we are 35 years later and our problems are no different than the early 1970's:

- User information requirements are not satisfied.
- Little or no planning is performed.
- Systems lack documentation.
- Data redundancy plaques corporate data bases.
- Systems lack integration.
- Projects are rarely delivered on time & within budget.
- Quality suffers.
- Development personnel are constantly fighting fires.
- And there is no real effort to share and re-use information resources.

Basically, what we have done over the last 35 years is taken a tool-oriented or technology-oriented approach to solving our systems problems. Instead, what is needed is a management-oriented approach that imposes a little leadership, discipline, organization and accountability. All of these problems are easily conquerable if we were to apply some simple, common-sense management techniques. Unfortunately, companies have abdicated control over their systems simply because management is no longer considered fashionable; that technology will solve all of our problems. And its this train of thought that makes me wonder if President's Bush's objective to conquer the country's dependency on oil will ever come to fruition. Technology without Management is Madness. You simply can't build anything of substance without a good set of blueprints.

FEBRUARY 13, 2006 - TECHNOLOGY OVERLOAD

I recently came upon an interesting study performed by Kings College in London for Hewlett Packard, the purpose of which was to study the effect of technology on worker performance. Basically, the study said that excessive use of technology can have an adverse effect on a person's brain power. This is somewhat disturbing as technology now permeates our society. As an example, while traveling through the airports recently I observed the majority of my fellow travelers "tuned out" by technology. The lion's share of travelers today make active use of iPods, PDA's, cell phones, DVD & CD players, and laptop computers. It also seems to me that fewer and fewer travelers read a book or engage in conversation anymore.

If the study is correct, and I believe it is, the manager should take notice of this adverse effect of technology and discourage the use of such devices, particularly at

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break time, and encourage more interpersonal contact instead. Technology has its place, but I tend to believe we rely too heavily on it. For example, using an automated calculator allows our brain to relax while the machine performs the math. Too often I've seen people reach for a calculator to perform a simple computation as opposed to working it out with paper and pencil. They simply do not want to engage their brains. Further, I have seen whole engineering departments come to a standstill when power outages brought their computers down. Do they really lack the skills to continue their work? Not really; their minds have simply been turned off by the technology.

FEBRUARY 20, 2006 - SYSTEM SNAFUS

In the January 30th issue of INFOWORLD magazine, there was an interesting story about *"Infamous IT Meltdowns"* which described colossal system development failures in the Government sector. In it, they listed the following failures:

The FBI "Virtual Case File" which attempted to replace the Fed's antiquated case management system. Ultimately, the project died due to the failure of defining an adequate project scope. Consequently, the project grew out of control. Last year, the government scrapped the entire program and went with something else. Cost to the taxpayer: $170 million.

The FAA's "Advanced Automation System" was an attempt to modernize the nation's air traffic control system which crashed before it even took over with a cost to the taxpayer of $2.6 billion.

The IRS's "Business Systems Modernization" which began in 1997 experienced problems due to personnel changes and scathing GAO reports. The project is still running with a cost to taxpayers at $8 billion and counting.

The Department of Defense's "Business Systems Modernization" has been called the "project from hell." A GAO report found the project to be "fundamentally flawed...and vulnerable to fraud, waste, and abuse." Cost to the taxpayer: $19 billion as of fiscal year 2004.

Were these projects doomed because they used the wrong tools? Probably not. They simply took a tool-oriented approach to systems development as opposed to a management-oriented approach. All of these systems can be conquered, but to do so requires no magical panacea, but a little good old-fashioned management and

upfront systems work. I will wager you that all of these projects had plenty of programmers but very few systems people.

FEBRUARY 27, 2006 - SPAM PHONE CALLS

Like many of you, I signed up for the national unsolicited phone call blocking system last year. And, Yes, it did cut down on the phone calls, but it amazes me that "Spam phone calls" somehow still get through. I still get calls both at home and at the office from headhunters, investment brokers, realtors, and credit card companies. I find it particularly amusing when I get a call and there isn't a human-being on the other end but a taped message instead. Its hard to thwart these calls, but I haven't given up trying.

I kind of like the approach used by Jerry Seinfeld on his television show a few years ago, where he got a spam phone call. Jerry interrupted the caller and said something to the effect of, *"Gee, I would really like to discuss this further with you, but I'm tied up right now, can I call you at home later tonight? No? You don't take phone calls at home? Now you know how I feel."*

I just wish it was as easy to contact a human-being through today's voice-mail systems as it is to get a spam phone call.

MARCH 6, 2006 - MY CANCELLATION OF AOL

No, I'm not really mad at America Online, but last week I finally cancelled my subscription with them after twelve long years. I began using AOL v2.0 in 1994, well before it became the powerhouse it is today and when CompuServe and Prodigy were the big guns of the business. I tried these other forums also but felt uncomfortable with their "look and feel." Although AOL wasn't yet as robust as the others, it offered an ease of use that I felt comfortable with. Back then I was still actively using v3.0 of IBM's OS/2 operating system and it ran just fine. But when Windows 95 & NT came out, AOL was forced to use a Win32 API which put a damper on my use of the product. For years, I maintained AOL v3.5 which was the last version supported by OS/2. AOL of course went up to v9.0 but my v3.5 worked just fine.

I also let my family use AOL at home where I had a small Windows based machine and it was a great way for them to learn how to use e-mail and the Internet. My family grew up with AOL and eventually migrated away from it in favor of web browsers and e-mail tools. Frankly, we were no longer using any of the AOL features except for

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surfing the Net. Small wonder that AOL's board of directors is worried about the future of the company. If customers do not believe they are getting value for the service, they're going to drop their subscriptions like a hot potatoe. Even worse, they might face the same fate as CompuServe and Prodigy, namely extinction!

MARCH 13, 2006 - REQUIREMENTS DEFINITION

I attended a trade show not long ago and sat in on a session that described a quick and dirty approach to software development as led by someone from academia. Basically, he described a process where the end-user was interviewed, information requirements specified and then, using power programming tools, software was created to satisfy the requirements. Specifying information requirements is a hot topic with me and I pressed the instructor on precisely what he meant by an information requirement. Frankly, all I got was a lot of vague generalities and no substance. Basically, all he was concerned with was a screen or report layout. There was no consideration for the business rationale for why the screen or report was needed, just its layout. This is very disheartening as people are still not asking the right questions to gain the insight the user needs to fulfill his/her business purpose. I guess this is one reason why we are content doing small things in systems development; we simply cannot expand our minds and think of total systems, just individual programs. I know the instructor meant well, but he is perpetuating the problem of poorly defined information requirements. I don't care how good of a programming tool he has got, an elegant solution to the wrong problem solves nothing.

MARCH 20, 2006 - TEACHING PROGRAMMING

Years ago when I was in High School, I studied Spanish. Basically, I was taught how to simply translate the language. I had problems with this at first since we were not given any insight into the philosophy of the Spanish language; for example, the language's use of the feminine and masculine gender, the expression of singular and plural, etc. It wasn't until I figured out the language's sentence structure did I start to really catch on. I wish I had taken a class in Latin before taking Spanish which would probably have better prepared me.

Having said this, let's consider how we teach programming today which, frankly, is no different. Most programming classes simply concentrate on coding which I consider a translation function. Very few describe the philosophy of programming and how to properly engineer a program. To me, the language itself is irrelevant; it is the

logic of the program that should be of paramount importance.

If you have been listening to my series on the *History of Systems Development*, you have probably heard me describe the development of the first four generations of programming languages. This is something that is typically not taught in a programming course, but should. I am not suggesting we teach students Machine Language, Assembly Language, or whatever, but, rather, why these languages were devised and the fundamental principles behind them.

What worries me is that the schools are producing more translators or coders and less software engineers.

MARCH 27, 2006 - MAGAZINE SUBSCRIPTIONS

Like many of you, I have subscribed to a number of magazines and newspapers over the years. One of the things that always bothered me was how my subscription rates steadily rose over the years. I would see ads for these same publications attracting new subscribers with lower prices and offering free radios, calendars, shirts, or whatever. For the existing customers; nothing. I always thought there should be some of incentive for loyal customers; you should get some sort of price break for longevity, such as 10, 20, or 30 years of loyal patronage. But unfortunately that is not the case. Instead, if you want any real price break, the publications want you to cancel your subscription, then order a new one at the new low rate with all of the freebies. But then again, what am I going to do with another radio or calendar?

I guess its all a numbers game and the publications are counting on us not grousing about the escalating prices.

APRIL 3, 2006 - QUICK AND DIRTY DEVELOPMENT

Today you hear a lot about "Agile Methodologies" for software development. To their proponent's credit, they admit their products are only aimed at software, not major systems. They also use a lot of techniques derived from what was called Joint Application Development (JAD) and Rapid Application Development (RAD). There is nothing new here. They are simply saying, let's sit down with an end-user, interrogate him, and then quickly deliver some sort of software to solve his problem. Two things bother me about this approach: first, they are suggesting an iterative approach to development whereby an initial program is developed and delivered to the user in 30 days, followed by updates each month. This is scary to me. As a user, I don't want to be using some

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half-baked software to run my business. The second thing that bothers me is that it is doubtful the software being developed for one user will interface with software being developed for another user. In other words, I question their ability to share and reuse data. Agile might be fine for developing a single program, but it is not the way to go for a major systems solution. In other words, I refer to Agile as "QAD" - Quick and Dirty development. Is this progress? I hardly think so.

APRIL 10, 2006 - DOT TELEPHONE NUMBERS"

I'm sure you've heard me say on more than one occasion that if anything in life is constant, it is change. I believe change is a natural part of our lives but I recognize that change for the sake of change is ridiculous. To this end, something rather trivial has surfaced recently that bothers me, and that is how we express telephone numbers in the age of the Internet. It used to be that we would express telephone numbers with simple dashes, slashes, and parentheses; for example, MBA's corporate telephone number is commonly expressed as 727/786-4567 or (727)786-4567. But now in the Internet age, this is considered passe. Instead, telephone numbers are being expressed with periods or dots as commonly found in e-mail or web addresses; for example, the politically correct way of representing our phone number today is 727.786.4567. I think I missed the memo when this change was supposed to have occurred and why it was being implemented. We now see several web pages and telephone books being modified to relist telephone numbers in the dot format. I don't know what the dot format buys us but I see this as a trivial change that is going to cost us a lot of money to implement. Yes, it is rather cosmetic but someone still has to edit the computer files to replace the dashes, back slashes and parentheses with periods, and this costs money to do so. Like I say, I don't see the value of implementing such a change simply to accommodate the latest fashion trend.

APRIL 17, 2006 - LET ME BE HONEST WITH YOU

There is an old expression which I have been hearing a lot in our vernacular these days, and that is *"Let me be honest with you."* I personally know a lot of people that use this expression and frankly, its getting old. I guess what bothers me about it is when a person says it, I come away thinking he has been dishonest with me all other times.

As creatures of habit, we tend to be repetitive in our speech. I have also heard expressions like *"At the end of the day"* and *"Frankly"* (which I am also guilty of us-

ing). Excessive use of expressions and buzzwords tend to be very distracting in a conversation and doesn't serve the speaker well. *"But frankly, at the end of the day, we have to be honest with each other."* See what I mean?

APRIL 24, 2006 - RISING GAS PRICES

I remember an incident that happened to my wife years ago in the early 1970's, this was back when gasoline was selling for $.35 a gallon. At the time she was driving a Pontiac Tempest convertible, one of those great gas-guzzling V8's of that era. She needed to fill the car with gas and pulled into the Standard Oil station. Being somewhat in a hurry, she accidently said to the attendants at the station, *"Can you give me $20 worth of gas?"* (she meant 20 gallons). This resulted in gales of laughter from the attendants who said, *"Lady, you can't put $20 worth of gas in that car, it would float away."*

Well, here we are 35 years later and you know what? You still can't put $20 of gas in a car. Well you can, but it won't go very far. Now, its more like $40 or $50 to fill up your car.

I never expected gas prices to stay at $.35, but I never dreamed they would get to the levels they are today. Back in the mid-1970's we had our first jolt when gas prices skyrocketed from $.35 a gallon to $.55. I'm sure a lot of you will remember the long lines at the pump that snarled traffic, and how Nixon reduced the Interstate speed limit from 70mph to 55mph in order to save gas.

Well gas prices are now almost six times what they were in the 1970's. The speed limit is back up to 70mph, Detroit keeps building gas guzzlers, and all of our cash is going overseas to foreign oil producers and automotive manufacturers. Gee, what's wrong with this picture? Hmm.

Part of the problem is that we, as consumers, have experienced so many gas hikes that we have become jaded and feel helpless to do anything about it. I also like those people that say, "Well, its not so bad in the United States, overseas they are already paying $5.00 a gallon or more." These are also the same people that think two wrongs make a right. I call it the "Keeping DOWN with the Jones'" phenomenon. Just because one group is screwed up doesn't mean we have to follow suit.

I'm just wondering when the American public is going to finally get fed up with the gas hikes and do something about it. I guess its time to register a bitch with our Congressmen.

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MAY 1, 2006 - CELL PHONES

Last year I did a "Pet Peeve" on cell phones, how I was irritated by those who use them while they're driving around. Well let's go beyond this. Last week, I had to make my monthly pilgrimage to Home Depot (which should be another Pet Peeve of mine, but we'll hold off on that for now). When I returned to my car, a woman parked in the next car asked me, *"Are you going out tonight?"*

Startled, I said, *"Excuse me?"*

She waved at me as if to brush me off.

She said, *"We'll, we're going to the concert tonight."*

I said, *"Great, which one?"*

Again, she waved me off.

Only then did I begin to realize that she had one of those new cell phone implants in her ear and that she was talking to a girlfriend.

I'm seeing more and more such incidents these days. The other day I had to run up to my bank. While waiting in the drivethru, the woman in the next car was yammering away seemingly to herself. Yep, she had one of those cell phone implants in her ear.

I guess what bothers me here is that these people have little regard for the people around them. They normally speak loudly and we are forced to share in their conversation; like we really care. Frankly, I find such banter as annoying as a kid playing rap loudly as he's driving around in his car. I think we have to get Miss Manners involved with this; some simple etiquette would be nice so people don't bother others around them.

I find it interesting that people seem to have no problem talking to a mechanical device, yet don't know how to hold a conversation with their neighbor or fellow worker. And they call this progress.

MAY 8, 2006 - NETWORKING" (or the lack thereof)

I've been bumping into a lot of younger people lately; young men in their early to mid-20's who have been asking me for advice on a variety of issues as they begin their careers. Basically, I tell them to start a life insurance policy, write a will, how to dress, and basic social amenities such as how to greet someone and tell a joke.

More importantly I stress upon them the need to network with their contemporaries.

When I was entering the work force back in the 1970's I found networking to be invaluable in my professional growth. I was particularly active in trade related organizations such as the local chapters of the Association for Systems Management, the Data Processing Management Association, and the Association for Computing Machinery. I also founded a local OS/2 Users Group and Java Users Group. I have also participated in other civic and fraternal organizations. All of these groups were invaluable to me in terms of education and the development of a network of contacts from whom I have relied on time and again.

I've noticed the younger people are less inclined to join in any such organization these days. I'm not sure why. Perhaps they don't think its cool. Perhaps there is no professional curiosity. Or perhaps they just don't know any better. Frankly, I think its the latter. As a result, these organizations are in decline. For example, ASM is now extinct; and DPMA changed its name and focus to the Association of IT Professionals; regardless their numbers are still diminishing. Instead of resisting participation in such organizations, I encourage young people to join them.

Networking is a great way to learn about your field of interest and to develop local contacts who might be helpful to you in your walk through life and you might be able to help them in return. Many people go into such organizations with the wrong intentions, such as they are going to sell the membership something. This is most definitely not the point; its about your professional growth. Its about learning; its about refining your social skills, and its about gaining visibility; all of which is important for developing a professional reputation. Once this is established, people will recognize you as the "go to" guy in your area of specialty, then, Yes, you may very well get some business. But don't go into an organization thinking you're going to conquer the world, think of it as an investment in your personal development.

One of the lessons I learned during my college career was that *"We enjoy life through the help and society of others."* I have found this to be particularly true in my professional development.

So, instead of staying home and watching that crap on TV every night, how about getting of your ass and attend a couple of meetings? Start with a trade group from your industry; then there's the chamber of commerce and

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Jaycees; then there's volunteer organizations such as the Rotary, Kiwanis and the Lions; then there's fraternal organizations such as the Masons and the Shrine. The list is actually endless; but seek out those organizations that will help you the most in your professional development. You might learn a thing or two in the process, and others might just learn a thing or two about you.

MAY 15, 2006 - INTERNET CHAIN LETTERS

I don't know about you, but I sure have been getting a lot of Internet Chain Letters in my e-mail box lately. Actually, its nothing new as we have been getting chain letters for several years now. The concept is actually quite simple, dream up some cockamamie scheme and solicit your friends to add their name to a list. Sometimes money is involved,but a lot of times it isn't. Basically, its nothing more than a pyramid scheme to clog the Internet and it can work if everyone was foolish enough to participate in them.

I particularly like the one that says Bill Gates will give everyone a dollar if you add your name to the list and forward the letter on to your friends. Or the one that attacks the gas companies. But most of the chain letters lately have been political or religious in nature where the authors try to appeal to your patriotism or sense of ethics. To me, this is downright dirty.

Look, its simple, its a chain letter that is aimed at clogging the Internet, nothing more, nothing less. No, you won't be jinxed or cursed if you don't respond to it. In fact, someone should be thanking you for not responding; you have just saved a lot of people a lot of time and a lot of trouble.

The Internet is a great way for communicating. Its also a great way to run the scam du jour. The people who invent these chain letters are probably the same people from Nigeria who want you to deposit money in your bank account. The only people who laugh all the way to the bank are the Nigerians.

So, next time you get a chain letter, do me and everyone else a favor, just hit the delete key.

MAY 22, 2006 - AIR TRAVEL

Do you remember when air travel was fun? I do. I used to love to travel. The food was reasonably good, you could have a good drink and smoke, and there was a general festive spirit on board. I also remember people would dress up when going on an airplane. Men would wear suit and ties, and women and children would wear their Sunday-best. It was quite common for whole families to meet you at the airport too which made you feel special. Sadly, air travel is no longer like this anymore. Airports are more like armed camps where prisoners are strip-searched and transferred from one cell block to another. We can thank the terrorists for this. But I guess what bothers me is that the mystique of air travel has disappeared. It is no longer a novelty; instead it has become a callous drudgery which kind of reminds me of how we used to feel about traveling by bus, which is probably more fun today than to travel by air.

Our expectations are also a lot lower today:

- Nobody expects to depart and arrive on time.
- We have no faith that our luggage will arrive intact; instead we prefer to use carryon luggage.
- We no longer expect a decent meal, but rather bring our own brown-bag on board.
- We no longer expect cleanliness on board and worry about head lice.
- And we no longer expect to talk with a company spokesman, but rather an automated kiosk.

Instead of relishing air travel, we now tolerate it and hope we survive. Its actually dehumanizing. Travelers dress grungy and no longer socialize like they did in the old days. Everyone is now plugged into either an iPod, a cell phone, MP3 player, laptop, or CD/DVD player. We're plugged in, tuned in and turned off.

This is all very sad as this used to be a great institution. We all used to love to travel, now we all dread it. But I guess this is the price of progress.

MAY 29, 2006 - POLITICAL CORRECTNESS IN THE WORKPLACE"

You know, I'm getting pretty tired of hearing about political correctness these days. Haven't we got anything else to worry about, like making a delivery deadline or making sure a customer is satisfied with our service? I guess not. Today we have to be sensitive to the rights and feelings of others. I've noticed there is a general hesitancy today to say just about anything that might offend someone. Well, you know what? Even with our speech cleaned up, we still seem to be irritating people. Frankly, I prefer the old ways where we used to tell others exactly what we thought from the heart as opposed to letting them guess what we're thinking.

Yea, I know we have to be sensitive to the rights and

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feelings of others but, you know, there are times when we just have to say *"Bullshit,"* which I consider a very versatile word. And I'm not alone in this regard. I've been told by my reps and customers in Japan that they also like the word *"Bullshit."* They say, *"Tim, we have nothing like it in our language. It says so much and can be used in so many different situations."*

Frankly, I don't think we use *"Bullshit"* enough. Its direct, it expresses how you feel, its great for communications, it gets things done. But, No, we have to pat people on the back and tell them, *"Well, better luck next time."* I don't know about you, but I don't have time for this. I need to make my point and move along. Its pretty bad when our speech gets in the way of conducting business. I wish we would worry less about political correctness and more on getting the job done. And wouldn't that be refreshing?

JUNE 5, 2006 - NEGATIVITY

Like many of you, I belong to several civic and industrial nonprofit organizations. I always find it amusing to see the elders of such organizations criticize the current slate of officers. Inevitably, you hear, *"That's not how we did things in my day."* They then go on to berate the officers on their performance. Well, sometimes they're right, but most of the time they are wrong. Dead wrong. If left unchecked, their negativity can consume an organization like a plague of locusts, to the point where the officers get frustrated and ultimately do nothing.

I can't remember ever attending a nonprofit group where everybody was happy with everything and everybody. In fact, I think its a myth. If such an organization exists, I sure would like to see it. Look, these nonprofit organizations are typically run by well meaning people with some time on their hands; and let us also not forget it is a VOLUNTEER type of organization. Rarely, if ever, are the officers paid for their services. True, people will make mistakes and need guidance, but not at the price of having their name besmirched. As Winston Churchill wisely observed, *"Any idiot can see what is wrong with something, but can you see what's right?"*

At a recent meeting of a nonprofit group I belong to, I heard one of the elder's grouse, *"Well, this is a rotten year and next year will be worse."*

I looked at him and said, *"No, it has been a good year and next year will be better."* I reminded him that the group had plenty of money in the bank and membership was on the rise. This caught him off guard and he recognized that I had the right attitude; that the glass was half-full, not half-empty.

No, the officers of such groups will not always be perfect, but then again, Who is? Its up to the group overall to pull things together, not just one or two officers.

For those who insist on whining about everything, I say, *"Get over it."*

I learned a long time ago in business not to complain unless I was prepared to suggest an alternative. But to bitch simply for the sake of bitching is counterproductive and disrupts the harmony of such groups. If I have any suggestion in this regard, I would ask the members of such groups to turn something negative into something positive.

JUNE 12, 2006 - MAKING EVERYTHING AGILE

The boys and girls playing with Agile Methodologies are at it again. For those of you not familiar with the "Agile" movement, this is a group of people who believe in conquering systems problems one program at a time using quick and dirty approaches for software development. Last year, they penned a "Declaration of Interdependence" whereby they promised to increase return on investment, deliver reliable results, boost performance, etc., etc. It may be nice for building a single program, but frankly, it has not been proven to be a viable approach for building an entire system. Basically, its the same old shell game in programming played out over the last 20 years.

Now there is a movement afoot to use Agile concepts in other parts of the business. They're not content with screwing up software development, now they want to ruin the rest of the business. Let's think about what they really mean by "Agile," which is a very hip word which implies flexibility, adaptation, and speed. In reality, the "Agile" approach includes interviewing the end-user, then rapidly writing a program and iterating through the process until the customer is satisfied. This may be fine for small inconsequential things but for anything of substance, forget it. But let's assume we're going to use this philosophy for something other than software for a moment; something like building a bridge. Under the "Agile" approach, the bridge engineer would consult with a team of builders to build the footings of the bridge and, separately, another group would build the support structures, another group would build the expanse, etc. Now what do you suppose the chance would be that the whole structure would hang together at the end? Zero to none, right? It is certainly not something I would want to drive over.

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The problem with the "Agile" approach is that they attack problems in piecemeal in a non-concerted method. Further, they would slap
something together quickly, then keep refining it until the client is
finally satisfied. When you are building anything of substance, such as
a bridge or an enterprise-wide system, this is hardly a suitable
method of operating. We simply couldn't afford it, nor do we have
the time to wait for it to all hang together. But this is exactly what the "Agile" advocates are recommending we do in business today. Sorry, but I simply don't buy it.

JUNE 19, 2006 - MORE ON AGILE METHODOLOGIES

Last week I spoke on how Agile Methodologies for software development are trying to creep into other parts of the business. Normally I don't like to repeat a topic, but a couple of things happened this past week which has caused me to pursue this a little further.

The first was a multimedia broadcast I saw on the Internet which consisted of one of the latest industry gurus espousing the virtues of Agile Methodologies. He made an interesting comment which took me by surprise; he contended that programmers are in the business of producing software, not producing documentation. He contended that producing design documentation was a complete waste of time and detracted from the real mission of programming. This is like trying to build a house without a set of blueprints. Without some form of documentation, there is no way to adequately specify what it to be done, thereby we can never substantiate that we have satisfied the requirements. Further, without documentation, it is difficult to maintain or modify anything. But this guru adamantly stuck to his guns.

The second event that happened this past week was that I happened to get a call from one of our first customers who used "PRIDE" back in the 1970's. We happened to get on to the subject of today's Agile Methodologies which he was familiar with. He said, *"Tim, there is nothing new here; its the same old shell game we played back in the 1960's and 1970's. Instead of laying out designs, we rushed to the coding pages and kept hacking away at the problem until we either wore out the end-user or ourselves. All they have done is just put a new spin on it."*

To me, Agile Methodologies are a confirmation that programmers lack discipline, organization, and accountability. It also confirms their identity as free-spirited artists.

You know, I have only met a handful of true programming geniuses along the way, such as Robert Beamer and Tom Richley; these are the true artists in my opinion. Most are just common house painters. So the question becomes: Do we believe systems development is an art-form or a science? An art-form implies an expression of taste and creativity that an individual intuitively possesses. Teaching the skills of the artist is extremely difficult to pass on from one person to another. A science, on the other hand, is based on accepted concepts and principles, something that can be easily taught and passed on to others. And this does not imply it lacks creativity. I find such disciplines as engineering and architecture hold a lot of creativity. As for me, I believe development is a science. And if we are ever going to tackle the huge backlog of requests for systems and software that business demands, we better start teaching it as such.

The thing that gets me is that the Agile Methodologists are serious about what they are doing. To me, they're simply dangerous.

JUNE 26 - SUPPORT THE TROOPS AUTO DECALS

I've been seeing a lot of "Support the Troops" auto decals on cars lately. Although there are several variations, its the twisted ribbon version I'm primarily talking about. These are nice patriotic gestures by car owners but I've observed something else, whoever displays these decals on their car tends to be a horrible driver. I don't know why this is, but I can tell when I have a lousy driver in front of me simply by spotting one of those ribbons. And it seems if they have multiple ribbons, they get even worse. Now I want you to understand that I am as patriotic as the next guy and I also support our troops, but this phenomenon happens way too often for it to be a coincidence. I guess I'm really not irritated that people are proudly displaying these stickers. In fact, I think they are performing a public service. Its kind of like having a "Slow Driver" sign attached to a car so you know how to drive around it. I hope this series of decals doesn't go away anytime soon as I have found them invaluable when driving around town.

Such is my Pet Peeve of the Week.

END

About the Author

Tim Bryce is the Managing Director of M. Bryce & Associates (MBA) of Palm Harbor, Florida and has 30 years of experience in the field of Information Resource Management (IRM). He is available for training and consulting on an international basis.

"PRIDE" Special Subject Bulletins can be found at:

   http://www.phmainstreet.com/mba/mbass.htm

They are also available through the "PRIDE Methodologies for IRM Discussion Group" at:

   http://groups.yahoo.com/group/mbapride/

You are welcome to join this group if you are so inclined.

The "Management Visions" Internet audio broadcast is available at:

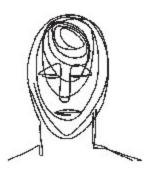   http://www.phmainstreet.com/mba/mv.htm

Also, be sure to read Tim's Blog at:

   http://blogs.ittoolbox.com/pm/irm/

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