

Bruce Claremont, July, 2006

Adventures in Consulting: Desktop Archaeology

Today we are going to cover a bit of archaeology. Desktop archeology, to be precise. My desktop, to be specific. I am not talking a computer desktop either. I mean the top of that wood, particle board, plastic, or metal bit of furniture upon which your computer resides. The place where every available surface collect bits of errata generated by one's job and personal habits. Things like technical references, candy wrappers, draft proposals, coffee cups, etc.

I think of myself as pretty neat and organized. However, I tend to place things I am not immediately focused on in piles. There is the things that require immediate attention pile, the things I need to get back to pile, and the things that are interesting, but can wait pile. A couple of weeks ago, I took stock and realized I had not actually seen the surface of my desk for a long time. Curiosity got the better of me, so I decided to excavate.

As a professional consultant, I am trained to accurately assess the time necessary to accomplish a task. I reviewed the mounds that covered my desk, calculated the time necessary to go through them, doubled the figure to pad the profit margin, and came up with one week to complete the task. It took two.

Next, I formulated a project plan. It was straightforward. I would first deal with the immediate pile because these were things I had to do. I would then deal with the get back to pile because these were things I should have done. Finally, I would take care of the interesting pile because these were things I wanted to do.

The immediate pile was vanquished quickly. It was small, consisting of business receipts to record, reports to file, and correspondence to return. I had soon reached a corner of the desktop, rediscovering its faux wood grain pattern.

The get back to pile proved more challenging. It contained web site updates that had not yet been applied, more receipts, and lots of documents that needed to be filed, but had never made their way to the file cabinet. The dust got thick and the paper yellowed as I worked my way down through the layers. Things were pretty much in reverse chronological order. When I started to encounter stuff dated 2003, it occurred to me that I had let things set a bit too long. But finally, I hit bottom. Another section of desk appeared, ready for a swipe with the dust cloth to reveal more glorious faux wood grain.

At last, I could tackle the biggest pile of all, the interesting pile. Here were articles I wanted to review, URL's I intended to visit, and notes I planned to formalize. The project deadline had passed and I should have just dumped the entire heap in the trash, but I plowed on. Now working 12 hour days, I read the articles, visited the URL's, and wrote up my notes. It was with a profound sense of accomplishment that I wiped the last section of desktop clean and admired the faux wood grain gleaming under the florescent lights.

Then I turned, picked up the two weeks worth of stuff that had accumulated on the floor beside the desk, placed it over the glossy faux wood grain, and got back to work.



About the author: Mr. Bruce Claremont runs a consulting business concentrating on OpenVMS, software migration, and hardware emulation. More information is available at www.MigrationSpecialties.com