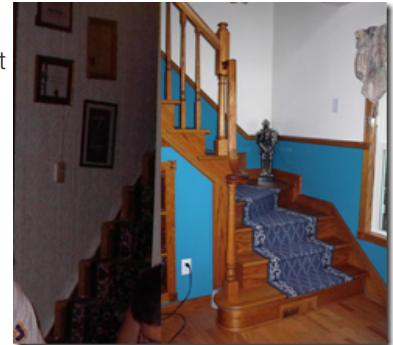


# Sometimes, If IT Isn't Broken, It Still Needs Fixing.



**Don MacVittie, 2011-30-08**

In our first house, we had a set of stairs that were horrible. They were unfinished, narrow, and steep. [Lori](#) went down them once with a vacuum cleaner, they were just not what we wanted in the house. They came out into the kitchen, so you were looking at these half-finished steps while sitting at the kitchen table. We covered them so they at least weren't showing bare treads, and then we... Got used to them.



Yes, that is what I said. We adapted. They were covered, making them minimally acceptable, they served their purpose, so we enjoyed them.

Then we had the house remodeled. Nearly all of it. And the first thing the general contractor did was rip out those stairs and put in a sweeping staircase that turned and came into the living room. The difference was astonishing. We had agreed to him moving the stairs, but hadn't put much more thought into it beyond his argument that it would save space upstairs and down, and they would no longer come out in the kitchen.

This acceptance of something "good enough" is what happens in business units when you deliver an application that doesn't perfectly suit their needs. They push for changes, and then settle into a restless truce. "That's the way it is" becomes the watch-word. But do not get confused, they are not happy with it. There is a difference between acceptance and enjoyment.

Stairs in question, before on left, after on right.

Another issue that we discovered while making changes to that house was "the incredible shrinking door". The enclosed porch on the back of the house was sitting on rail road ties from about a century ago, and they were starting into accelerated degradation. The part of the porch not attached to the house was shrinking yearly. Twice I sawed off the bottom of the door to the porch so that it would open and close. It really didn't bother us overly much, because it happened over the course of years, and we adapted to the changes as they occurred. When we finally had that porch ripped off to put an actual addition on the house, we realized how painful dealing with the porch and its outer door had been.

This too is what happens in business units when over time the usability of a given application slowly degrades or the system slowly becomes out of date. Users adapt, making it do what they want because, like our door, the changes occur day-to-day, not in one big catastrophic heap.

So it is worth your time to occasionally look over your application portfolio and consider the new technologies you've brought in since each application was implemented. Decide if there are ways you can improve the experience without a ton of overhead. Your users may not even realize you're causing them pain anymore, which means you may be able to offer them help they don't know they're looking for. Consider, would a given application perform better if placed behind an [ADC](#), would putting a Web Application Firewall in front of an application make it more secure simply because the vendor is updating the Web App Firewall to adapt to new threats and your developers only update the application on occasion? Would shortening the backup window with storage tiering such as F5's [ARX](#) offers improve application performance by reducing network traffic during backups and/or replication? Would changes in development libraries benefit existing applications? Granted, that one can be a bit more involved and has more potential for going wrong, but it is possible that the benefits are worth the investment/risk – that's what the evaluation is for. Would turning on [WAN Optimization](#) between datacenters increase available bandwidth and thus improve application performance of all applications utilizing that connection? Would offloading encryption to an ADC decrease CPU utilization and thus improve performance of a wide swath of applications in the DC – particularly VM-based applications that are already sharing a CPU and could gain substantially from offloading encryption?

These are the things that in the day-to-day crush of serving the business units and making certain the organizations' systems are on-line we don't generally think of, but some of them are simple to implement and offer a huge return – both in terms of application stability/performance and in terms of inter-department relations. Business units love to hear “we made that better” when they didn't badger you to do so, and if the time investment is small they won't ask why you weren't doing what they *did* badger you to do.

Always a fresh look. Your DC is not green field, but it is also not curing cement. Consider all the ways that something benefitting application X can benefit other applications, and what the costs of doing so will be. It is a powerful way to stay dynamic without rip-and-replace upgrades. If you're an IT Architect, this is just part of your job, if you're not, it's simply good practice.

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