Technology Turnout. Things college grads will never see.

Don MacVittie, 2010-29-06

Lori and I were discussing accomplishments with our 23 year old a week or so ago, and he is keeping score of the things we've done and he's done. We've written books, he's written books. We've written for a magazine, he's written for a magazine. Then he hit the things he has to do if he is to "win", including both ANSI and ISO standards, masters degree, etc etc. (there's actually one I can't mention yet).

While trying to impress upon him that it is not a competition and we just want him to have a long and happy life, we got into a discussion about things we've done that he'll likely never do. That discussion inspired this post. There are quite a few things that new IT employees will just not have to cope with. I'll start the list, feel free to tag on with comments about similar things.

1. **Wipe a BIOS password with a piece of tinfoil.** Way back in the early 90s we had a machine we had just added a drive to, and the BIOS was password protected. We could not find the password anywhere, and had no recollection of what it might be. So we dragged up a pinout of the motherboard, and found the chip the password was stored in, used tinfoil along the fins and booted it up. Viola! We were in. I'm guessing you can't do that today, but haven't had occasion to try since then.

2. **Build Novell NIC drivers during install and upgrade.** Remember that? A fistful of floppies and hours in front of the monitor to get one driver? And of course we had a cobbled together 10-base-T home network, so we had to do separate builds for each card… Half a day per install, we were careful with our Novell servers.

3. **Write in-line assembly.** We had some pretty extensive libraries of inline assembly routines for our C++ code – both at work and at home. Unless you're doing specific embedded apps, this just isn't necessary anymore.

4. **Drill holes and rip up floors to run CAT-5/6**. We've wired two houses, and now use only enough of that wiring to connect our APS and servers to the core switches. The enterprise is largely going this route too, outside the DC.

5. **Build your own machine.** We built a ton of desktops, with names like The Tower Of Power, and Alice. A couple of years ago I built Sorenson – a tower with gigs of RAM and more than a terabyte of disk – and he's the last. Prices have nearly reached parity for completed systems.

6. **Use a floppy-based hex editor to restore the Master Boot Record.** We lost a disk – don't recall if it was a programming error or virus, but got the valid hex for an MBR off another disk and typed it in to get the disk back to life.

7. **For that matter, use a floppy disk.** That's a technology that fell by the wayside on the information superhighway.

8. **While we're at it, save programs to cassette tape.** An old Adam computer. Lots of fun, if you had the free time.

9. **Write complex graphics manipulation code.** Our GIS software (I say "ours" loosely, it belonged to a variety of companies) was full of genius-level coding to get arcs and polygons to render and break up correctly. These days, there are libraries to do all that for you. And we wrote to WMF/EMF format while rendering. Today we'd use an XML format of some kind.

10. **Try (and fail) to reuse thermal printer paper. Or even recognize thermal printer paper outside of a receipt.** Anyone else own an Aquarius?

11. **Poke hex code directly into memory and call upon $deity that it works.** TRS-80s and Apple IIcs were great for this.

12. **Read a manual.** At least in paper. Smart cookies will still read manuals for products they have to use every day, but they'll do it on-screen or on-kindle. For day-to-day use, web pages are just too handy a high-tech reference.

13. **Dial Up.** I worked for a phone company where we could use ISDN to connect to the Internet, and we were the

speedy kids.

14. **Spend the night looking for the null pointer.** Sure, some development still has this issue, but mostly device and embedded development. Software shops have this issue, but more often does not at this point in time. Enterprises rarely do unless they have some legacy code lying around.

15. **Write a config file from scratch.** XML everywhere! Buy a library, set a tag, set a value, done.

16. **Manipulate protocol headers.** We did it for testing, but there aren't many people left who could/would want to.

17. **Run your own mail server.** We still do, and F5 still does, but those days are limited, methinks.

18. **CORBA/DDE/OLE code.** Enough said. Shudder.

19. **DB-9 Serial Ports.** They've not gone the way of the dodo yet, but more and more new machines don't include them. The entire concept of a "parallel port" is just plain gone.

20. **Dropping DB admin credentials into your source code.** Everyone did it, everyone did it for much longer than they'll admit, but this practice finally seems dead in mainstream IT. Thank goodness.
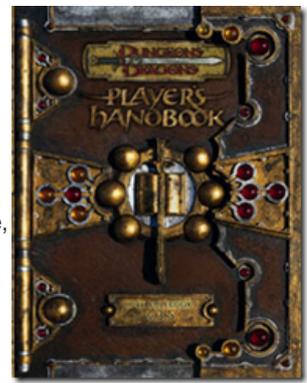
I could go on, but these were the fun and glaring ones. If you have any, feel free to tack them onto the end. And no, F5 co-workers, don't tell me about manipulating protocols… Of course our dev guys are experts at it, but we were not working for a network equipment vendor at the time.

The boy? He'll be a success, and hopefully realize along the way that it is not a competition. Meanwhile, he has Memes, WoW, and D&D 3.5 that we don't have, and wouldn't want any more than he'd want the things above. But he does provide fodder for some of our posts.

Image courtesy of Geek Native

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