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Take a surgical approach
By: Alan K'necht (08 Aug 2003)

We've all been there - faced with a daunting large project with a ridiculous short time frame or a tiny nothing project that seems so simple that, to quote a popular ad campaign, we just do it.

And that is exactly the problem: we just do it. We're IT professionals and we are supposed to do it right, not just do it. So the problem is rooted in how, as IT professionals, we go about doing the job. And the 'how it's done' always comes back to haunt us or our successors.

In order to get things done in ridiculously short time frames, we inevitably skip a step. This may be not properly scoping the project, shortcutting the QA process or not writing complete and proper documentation. On those quick little jobs, rarely is QA done and I can guarantee that most programmers don't think about updating the documentation or the user guide.

While skipping these little steps may get the job done and make the boss happy for a day, when the application crashes or someone else needs to make a change and the documentation doesn't match what's there, and change delivery time increases, the boss's smile quickly turns to a frown.

So what can we do? First, let's think of ourselves as professionals. Professionals have codes of ethics. So let's start standing up and saying we need the time to do it right the first time.

Need some examples to take to your boss/client? Try the surgeon analogy.

Ask your boss to imagine for a moment that he or she needed an operation. The surgeon explains that the procedure takes two hours, plus he or she needs to come in a few times prior to the surgery for x-rays and examinations. Following the surgery, the doctor needs to follow up a couple times. Would your boss tell the surgeon, "You know what? I only have an hour, so let's do it now, and don't take more than 60 minutes."

The obvious answer is no, yet when it comes to building, maintaining and fixing mission critical applications, that's exactly what many people do.

We need to educate our bosses/clients so they know what's involved and why certain steps are not only required, but mandatory. Let's start educating everyone on why preliminary documentation, application documentation and full and complete QA is important to not only the immediate, but also the long term success of the IT project.

It's only by acting as professionals that we'll earn respect and ensure IT development is seen as an investment for the future.

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