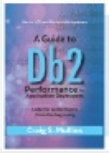
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August/September 2013

Data Perspectives

DBA Proverbs – More Word to Live By

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As regular readers of this column know, I collect quotes, sayings and proverbs that apply to database administration (or, at least, I think they apply). Here's the latest in a semi-regular series of DBA proverbs.

We begin this set of proverbs with a bit of ancient Chinese wisdom from Confucius, who said, "Real knowledge is to know the extent of one's ignorance." Technology, especially database technology, can quickly teach humility to even the most arrogant person. A wise DBA will know that he or she is always learning and that there's always something more to be learned.

But wisdom isn't limited to coming from the Far East … sometimes it comes from the Deep South. Blues musician Blind Lemon Jefferson taught us well when he said, "Knowin' all the words in the dictionary ain't gonna help if you got

complexity involved in managing database systems. There's no way anybody can know everything about DB2 or Oracle or SQL Server … so learn as much as you can but know where to find the answers for those things you don't know.

Although he was a religious man, John Henry Newman (aka Cardinal Newman) probably would have been a good DBA. Newman said, "Let us take things as we find them: Let us not attempt to distort them into what they are not. We cannot make facts. All our wishing cannot change them." This should be the first rule of the DBA. You can't change the facts, so learn what they are and work with the reality of the situation. This is particularly good advice when dealing with production problems that impact business operations. Deal with the facts instead of giving in to the emotional reactions sure to be there when production fails. Doing so will result in a quicker recovery for sure!

The amount of work required of database professionals can be quite a troubling component of the job of a DBA. British

nuttin' to say." Well, American astronomer and author Clifford Stoll sure had something to say when he asked, "Why is it drug addicts and computer aficionados are both called users?" Hmmmm … that's a good question, don't you think?

Benjamin Franklin neatly summed up the importance of learning when he said, "An investment in knowledge pays the best interest." And Mark Twain reinforces the unending need for learning when he explained that, "We are all ignorant, only on different subjects." If you don't believe that one, ask an expert CICS systems programmer to debug your SQL.

I guess American author and cartoonist James Thurber had a different, though equally as valuable way, of looking at things. He posited that, "It is better to know some of the questions than all of the answers." This gets right to the heart of the naval historian C. Northcote Parkinson offers us some advice in that area. As Parkinson tells it, "Work expands so as to fill the time available for its completion." If we embrace that as the truth, then perhaps with focus and drive we can manage to get more work done in the same time. But I'm not saying, "Work smarter, not harder" because regardless of who first said that, we can be sure it was a manager trying to avoid work altogether!

Before we end this edition of DBA Proverbs, let's bring back James Thurber for a quote we all should take to heart, "Let us not look back in anger, nor forward in fear, but around in awareness." If we all look around in awareness maybe we will produce higher quality databases, applications and systems … just maybe.

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Earlier DBA Proverbs columns:

- DBA Proverbs (Dec 2008)
- More DBA Proverbs (Sept 2010)
- The Return of the DBA Proverbs (Oct 2011)

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