Blogs for These Times of Certainty

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Distribution Notes: This document may be freely distributed to all interested audiences to help APM and other product Administrators/Users. However, no modifications may be made to this work.

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1. Introduction

After writing a series of technical blogs, I decided to discuss more life choices and philosophical issues in 2015-2016. Although these appear in the APM Community, they also apply to other products and careers. I am now distributing them in e-book format with minor editing. Please feel free to drop me a line on what you think about them.

2.1 Confessions of a Serial Change Agent: Part 1 (2015)
Original URL: https://communities.ca.com/community/ca-apm/blog/2015/11/22/the-confessions-of-a-serial-change-agent-part-1-overview

[This is a two part series on being a change agent. This first part is the characteristics of being a good change agent.]

Introduction

It is Sunday morning somewhere. And someone is frazzled after a long sleepless night where they are half afraid of making the wrong choice and the other half consumed by the implications of making the correct one. In these situations, there are three real choices:

1. Accept the situation. Nothing changes and you have to grin and bear it. One becomes stuck in time where they are not moving things forwards or backwards. Health implications may arise. Robert E. Quinn talks about the "Slow Death Dilemma" because of the reluctance to deal with things.

Like American journalist Esther Wojcicki says, "The worst thing that you can do in life is whine about what you can't change."

2. Leave the situation. By doing this risks that things will be about the same or better. But there is the other scary possibility the situation becomes far worse

3. Shake up things by being a change agent.
Ask yourself this question:
If you are not going to try to improve the world now, then when? The change agent sees no obstacles only unexpected gifts.

Why be a change agent?
I have been a serial change agent for most of my life. In each point in my career, I have left successfully the situation better than I found it.

This is what I said about being a change agent in my book *Musings*:

Being an "in the trenches" change agent is a huge risk. You are the pioneer who gets the arrows in the back. You have no official responsibility to do anything. People you don't even know may yell and scream at you because they are frightened by your efforts. And if you succeed, others likely will take the credit and build on what you did.

But what about the rewards you may achieve?

These include the following:
- Making a real difference in the world by overcoming the conventional wisdom and changing something for the better.
- Personally bringing to the world happiness, increased productivity, and moving things forward.
- It is the greatest self-reward in the world for having done this.
- It gives you energy for undertaking the next major change.
- You will learn things about yourself and your capabilities that you did not know already.

Characteristics of a Change Agent

These are the behavior patterns of a successful change agent:
- Fearlessness
- Active Listener
- Good Communicator
- Can clearly explain the difference between the AS-IS (Current) and TO-BE (Future) environments.
- Empowers themselves to make needed changes.
- Works with the end in mind.
- Has a strong sense of commitment and incredible perseverance.
- Understands well their own strengths and weaknesses.
- A good facilitator
- A talented builder of ad hoc and permanent coalitions.

Characteristics of a Serial Change Agent.

The most involved change agents move from one situation to another doing what they can to improve the situation. Let's call them **serial change agents**. In addition to the above, they

do the following:

- Have a strong sense of perseverance

- Ability to recharge on the fly

- Believes in the reverse of the Butterfly Effect -- if you want to change one thing, change everything.

- Uses some of the techniques learned from previous change efforts.

- Dynamically learns and adjusts.

I would love to see conversations spring forth on being a change agent in and outside CA.
I want to hear more what you have accomplished after seeing a need for improvement.
You can reach me to discuss further at hallett.german@ca.com

Next time, I will talk about some of the things that I have done as an APM change agent.

References

http://www.inc.com/magazine/201510/jeff-bercovici/the-dna-whisperer.html Where the no obstacles and the Esther Wojcicki quote came from

Quinn, Robert E. *Deep Change: Discovering the Leader Within*. New York:Jossey Bass 1996 Print. My favorite book on the subject.

https://www.smashwords.com/books/view/399500 Musings. Includes my very incomplete look at this area.

2.2 Confessions of a Serial Change Agent: Part 2 (2015)
Original URL: https://communities.ca.com/community/ca-apm/blog/2015/12/06/the-confessions-of-a-serial-change-agent-part-2-apm

Introduction
This is the second half of a two-part blog discussing the rarest of creatures -- the serial change agent. Last time, I covered the characteristics of being an excellent change agent.
This month, I will talk about some of the things that I have done as an APM change agent. I will start from an individual level and work up.

Seven Steps

1. Ask questions

Never stop asking why things are the way they are. Try to understand the various challenges and skill sets of key stakeholder organizations and players. This helps to determine the best way to make changes. The [KB on MTP and TIM compatible releases](#) was one such recent result.

2. Identify gaps and do something about them.

A wise manager at CA said to me, "Anyone can point out something's wrong in a situation. Far fewer hear the call and try to resolve things." An example of the former is the fictional character from Saturday Night Live: [Oscar "Fixit" Rogers](#). I have taken my ex-manager's words to heart. If I see something is not correct, then the next immediate step is an actionable item for improvement.

3. Document like crazy.

Since 2006, I have documenting through emails, [Tech Tips](#), [Tech Docs](#), knowledge documents, blogs, internal presentations, and cases the various best practices in APM to produce stable, scalable environments. This sizable body of knowledge has enhanced the APM administration experience.

4. Look for like-minded individuals.

They are the ones that raise key issues and then do something individually about it. Keep talking with each other and good things will happen.

5. Form ad hoc project teams to get things done.

With #2 in place, small teams can be created to quickly implement needed change deliverables. Then when the work is done, end the team. Repeat again when the next opportunity forms itself.

6. Form "permanent" teams as needed.

I took over running the APM Documentation Board which meets each month. This group has quietly improved long-standing documentation shortcomings and works hard to make APM technical documentation better suit your needs. Examples include adding the [APM Troubleshooting](#) and [Error](#) sections, providing a link to the [MTP documentation on span ports](#),

and much more. <u>Have an APM documentation concern and want to make sure the right people hear about it?</u> Feel free to drop me a note at hallett.german@ca.com

There are other efforts as well that may be a subject of future blogs.

7. Address concerns across products.
From my experience with the Problem-Solving, Knowledge Management, and Search Engine cross-product projects this year, I have seen how conversations and linkages across products leads to better customer experiences through streamlined processes.

Conclusion

In summary, <u>change what you can today, change even more tomorrow</u>. **The rapid pace of transformation in the world means that we can longer afford to be comfortably on the sidelines.** You are going to be here for some time. So, might as well make a difference, no matter how small. I hope these two articles inspire someone to get out of their comfort zone and help transform their universe in some way.

2.3 Why Problems and Outages are Blessings in Disguise (2016)
Original URL: https://communities.ca.com/community/ca-apm/blog/2016/01/24/apm-blog-why-problems-and-outages-are-blessings-in-disguise

Introduction

Thomas Johnston is exhausted after spending a good part of the weekend battling an APM outage. After making some configuration adjustments and an EM/agent restart, peace is restored and he can get some overdue sleep. All is good until the next issue needs resolving. But a wise person not knowing much about technology at the time told them, "Be grateful for the problem. You will learn something out of it and will work hard to ensure that it never happens again."

In this blog, I discuss how APM problems and outages are really opportunities for improvement. This can take place in several phases.

1: Self-Investigation

Going through a "lessons learned" group exercise is key for ongoing success. This includes reviewing

- What was supposed to happen?
- What actually did happen?
- What went well during the problem-solving phase?
- What did not go well?
- What can be better done differently next problem?

If there are improvements to processes and resources as a result, then this is time well spent.

The same thing should be done at a personal level. Questions that can be asked are:
- How quickly did it take to determine what the problem was? What steps were important in achieving this?
- Were there some questions that I could ask or things that I could have done to find the issue quicker?
- Are there subject areas that need to brush up on?
- Are there third-party troubleshooting tools/field packs that I should consider using?

2: Short and Mid Term Fixes

Short-, mid-, and long-term stabilization measures should be investigated. This may include
- EM but not agent upgrades to interim releases.
- Adding new hardware to replace or supplement the current cluster load
- Doing ongoing health checks, oil change and architectural reviews to evaluate needed changes and optimize the environment
- Create or evaluate an APM personal training plan on new features, performance, troubleshooting, and optimization.
- Clean up network traffic/private keys for TIM.
- Implement APM Monitoring strategy and Roadmap

3. Longer-Term fixes

Most sites have a longer-term plan. It includes:
- Cluster upgrades to major/more current releases including agents.
- Ongoing cluster health trend analysis and capacity planning

- Having lifecycle APM cluster environments to act as a sandbox for suggested performance changes and to test future releases

Hopefully, this has been a helpful discussion. I would love to hear your comments on how past problems became opportunities for improvements

2.4 Contracted Mind vs Reflective Mind: An Owner's Manual (2016)
Original URL: https://communities.ca.com/community/ca-apm/blog/2016/02/14/contracted-vs-reflective-mind-an-owners-manual

This is a follow-up to my last blog on why Outages are Blessings in Disguise.

Introduction

Imagine that it is 2 A.M. and you are woken out of a sound sleep to attend a bridge call about an APM outage. After you join in, you discover that you have been unknowingly given the ability to read people's minds and directly feel their emotions. What would discover? How would you react towards them?

You would likely find these two mind states:

1. The Contracted Mind

During times of stress (such as outages), some people are filled with low confidence and are driven by emotions such as fear, anger, doubt, or anxiety. Some of the questions they could be pondering are:

- Will I lose face or my job because of this?
- What other things am I doing wrong?
- If only I did....
- What can I really depend on?

By dwelling on questions like above, the attention is taken away from the present and the problem at hand. Their scope is quiet narrow and likely will miss subtle messages that a log or metric analysis will show.

Recognition that we are in this mind state is the first step of breaking out. This could be followed by pausing before further action is taken, re-focusing on the issue at hand, and diving back in.

2. The Reflective Mind

Others may be more philosophical -- "stuff happens." They have a higher degree of confidence and a wider scope of the world. They pause, deliberate, and then react. If they were on such a call, they might be asking questions such as:

- Do I have all the right resources on this call?
- Have we accurately defined the problem?
- Are we noting as we are going along the things that we are doing to solve this issue and how we could do it better?
- How can we ensure that this issue never happens again?

And thinking like this, the likelihood of issue resolution increases.

You can see the tremendous difference between the two worldviews. One drowning in a river of emotion, the other dedicated to the issue before them. **Which did you choose the last time a stressful situation happened to you?**

I want to conclude with two items:

First, the story of Mohini. She was a White Tiger being kept at the Washington Zoo. For most of the time there, she lived in a 12 by 12 cage. There was those that wanted her to experience greater freedom, so a far larger enclosure was built. But instead of seeing the larger space, Mohini stayed in an area that was still 12 by 12. So it is with the contracted mind.
http://itrustican.blogspot.com/2011/09/story-of-mohini-white-tiger.html

I end with this quote from Mark Twain -- "I've had a lot of worries in my life, most of which never happened."

Here to wishing that your life be filled with happiness and be free from self-imposed stress.

Introduction

Each day, I think a good deal about the learning path of being of service to others. It is something that I learned at a very young age and apply actively while working on APM support cases. But what does this concept really mean?

While discussing anything, I like to start with a definition. There are **eleven** different meanings tha tMerriam-Webster has about this concept! For this article, I will take service to mean *"a series of actions where one selflessly helps and attempts to bring happiness to others."*

Nine Characteristics of Support Service

These are presented in no particular order.

1) Attitude of gratitude -- Be happy that you have a chance to help others, improve a technical situation. Recognize this when the case comes in, before/after each conference call, and when the issue gets resolved.

2) Have an open mind

3) Have the idea of Beginners Mind. It refers to having an attitude of openness, eagerness, and lack of preconceptions when studying a subject, even when studying at an advanced level, just as a beginner in that subject would. Wikipedia

4) Be eager to work on the issue and bring technical happiness to the world! Let this to be visible to all!

5) Fearlessness -- Leave no stone unturned while working on an issue. Engage any resource that you may think that you feel will help resolve the issue.

6) Acceptance and Surrender to the Situation. Dive into the issue and totally focus on it. This is the most important thing in your life at that moment and give it the attention that is required.

7) <u>Seek to understand through deep listening.</u> Understand what is and is not being said. Recognize and acknowledge the emotional pain points a customer may be having

8) <u>Go on to the next one.</u> At the end of the time, there is always another challenge needing resolution. Accept, dive in, and repeat the above list.

9) <u>Recognize and appreciate the human factor.</u> Always let each customer know how important their issue is and "it is just not another ticket."

Conclusion

Sometime back I created the Support version of the Bodhisattva Vow. I try to live by it each day.

Users are Numberless
I Vow to Help Them All
Broken Systems are Many
I Vow to Fix Them All
Product Knowledge is Limitless
I Vow to Learn it All
There is Nothing Better Than a Happy Customer
I Vow to Accomplish It

I look forward to talking to many of you soon.

2.6 Thriving in Times of Certainty (2016)
    Original URL: https://communities.ca.com/community/ca-apm/blog/2016/05/28/blog-thriving-in-times-of-certainty

Introduction: It's a VUCA World?

(Thanks to Pixabay for providing commercial-free photos.)

There are those that see the world as bursting with **VUCA** (**V**olatility, **U**ncertainty, **C**omplexity, and **A**mbiguity) as if this is a unique and new thing. They spend countless hours attempting to offset the great unknowns of their times.

But you can look at most time periods in history, you pretty much find the same thing. So this is not a new trend. Just maybe a little more of it. When dealing with computing infrastructures there are at least five themes that keep reoccurring. Some IT veterans have worked both sides of the issue spectrum at least twice. If you understand the tradeoffs, your career and organization will stay afloat and move ahead. What is the right answer depends on what is best for your organization for the present and near future.

Five Themes

These themes include:

1) **Company-staffed or third-party?**
The days of companies' performing all IT functions are of the distant past. Companies are outsourcing various staffing needs as well as their computing infrastructure. Physical versus virtual, in or out of the cloud are related concerns. Costs, level of service, outsourcing company culture and infrastructure stability are all factors to consider. Outside of the computing industry, many of these arguments are being replayed recently with the debate over the possible outsourcing of TSA responsibilities to be more responsive to long security lines. (Note: This is done already at San Francisco and smaller airports.)

2) **Centralized versus decentralized?**
This is somewhat like the first item. Centralized environments may be able to set company-wide standards and have less redundant staff. But they could be more bureaucratic to the needs of a business unit than a local group. Sometimes overlooked is a hybrid model which is centralizing those things that make sense and decentralize all others. Dialogue on this topic can also be found between federal and state governments, state and local governments, regional versus city government. Don't expect this to be solved soon as the pendulum swings back and forth.

3) Reactive versus Proactive?

I have discussed this at length in earlier articles. Proactive takes more organization and time. But eventually should result in optimized, secure systems having less downtime. Others would rather "pay as you go" and only deal with things when they break. And if outages occur, then do typically minimal changes. A real-world version of this can be found on how visits you have go to the dentist. This can depend on the degree of proactive flossing and brushing versus benign neglect.

4) Standard versus Proprietary?

In theory, standards mean that you would expect a minimum set of behavior across hardware or software. Some vendors either ignore standards and make their own internal approach or "improve" the standard with proprietary add-ons. Others reverse-engineer proprietary software with their own clone. One example of what may happen with standards is HTML. No two browsers handle a HTML 5 web-page the same way. So rigorous testing and requirements gathering is recommended on what product(s) make sense for you.

5) Legacy versus New Software?

This is not an easy question. Do you keep your old software that is dependable and you know in or out? Or do you buy something that may be more modern, responsive, scalable, and feature rich? And a secondary issue is do you build your own or buy technology. Again, the answer is always what makes sense for your organization as opposed to being a given answer.

I would love to get your take on how much of your work life is spent on grappling with these larger themes and what have you learned in the process. Please share your thoughts.

2.7 The Gentle Art of Remote Support Communications (2016)
   Original URL: https://communities.ca.com/community/ca-apm/blog/2016/05/29/blog-the-gentle-art-of-remote-support-communications

[My thanks to the fine folks at Pixabay for their free illustrations.]
Introduction

In the modern world, many conversations are not face-to face. They are often with people that we never have or ever will meet. We may not know what they look like or what their favorite food is. What are some of the things that we can do to make this a success -- especially for Technical Support Staff?

Nine Guidelines

1. Remote communications even under optimal conditions are never easy. <u>So work hard at it</u>. Don't assume that your words were understood. Take nothing for granted. Always ask if there are questions or concerns.

2. Come from a <u>place of service</u>. Offer a caring attitude to your audience. They are the most important thing in your life at that time.

3. Offer a reflective mind. Add nothing extra to the equation regardless how you feel that day. Keep the feelings to yourself.

4. Have a Beginners Mind. Treat the conversation as this is the first time you ever had this discussion rather than go in with preconceived notions and set objectives.

5. <u>It is all a dance.</u> So have fun with it and enjoy the ride. Let the conversation go through its various twists and turns. Sometimes it may drift. But that's okay. Being slightly off-topic may reveal other insights.

6. <u>Deep Listening.</u> Listen beyond the words to what is really being said, what is not being said, and what the person is feeling.

7. <u>Humor at Times</u> It may not work with all audiences and all situations. But keeping things light can be an invaluable aid.

8. <u>Active Listening.</u> Show you understand through reflective listening. Give the speaker the needed time to be heard and understood.

9. <u>WebEx's/Illustrations</u>. Both parties seeing the same thing rather than verbally describing something can help move things along.

Please let me know the techniques that **you** use for this increasingly important area.

2.8 Is Software Support a Good Career Choice for you? (2016)

Original URL: https://communities.ca.com/community/ca-apm/blog/2016/05/15/blog-is-software-support-a-good-career-choice-for-you

[The opening is a nod to Jack London's *The Scarlet Plague*. Learn more about this work at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Scarlet_Plague]

It was to be the last camp fire for the Old One. He had lived during the time that there were cities, car, planes, and other amazing things. But life as he knew it changed in such a short period of time. The water supply became infected with an unknown virus. And almost all humankind rapidly perished. Only a few survivors remained, living in forests. In time, the remaining vestiges of an advanced civilization would be covered over by vegetation.

The Old One did not have long to live. Before leaving, he wanted to impart his wisdom on those that would succeed him. He started to tell his story.

...Then one of the impatient youngsters interrupted, "Didn't once tell us that you used to do one time something called Software Support? Tell us more about this."

Just by the mention of the words "Software Support" opened the floodgates of wonder and horror for the Old One. He declined to discuss that topic further and talked instead about his treasure trove of knowledge that he was leaving behind.]

This article discusses the tradeoffs of going into Software Support as a career. It does not have to be the horror show alluded to above. In fact, the opposite is more often true.

The Advantages

1. You get to refine your problem-solving skills and knowledge across multiple disciplines. Today's software touches across many areas such as integrations, networks, databases, applications, hardware. You get to be an expert in many areas.

2. The camaraderie is tremendous. Management and employees are all working together to have happy customers and produce stable, scalable environments. I found that the case here at CA Technologies.

3. Time and training is provided to keep you current. This is often taught by the developers themselves. You can also install and work with beta software before public release.

4. You get to work with a lot of internal groups. Product Management, Professional Services, Pre-Sales, Communities, Knowledge Management, Documentation and more. Together you can make a big difference as to the customer experience

5. You have an opportunity to improve the product through submission of documentation and software bugs. Or through knowledge documents.

6. You have a chance to provide a sense of service to others and yourself. Seehttps://communities.ca.com/community/ca-apm/blog/2016/02/21/on-service-and-apm-support

The Disadvantages

1. You are often on your own. It may involve looking at terse error messages. See https://communities.ca.com/community/ca-apm/blog/2016/04/24/disarming-the-power-and-frustration-of-error-messages. Things are underdocumented or undocumented. New scenarios are discovered. This can be a challenge for some people dealing with heavy periods of uncertainty.

2. You get to deal with some people very emotionally charged due to ailing systems. Seehttps://communities.ca.com/community/ca-apm/blog/2016/02/14/contracted-vs-reflective-mind-an-owners-manual. On the other side of the coin, it offers a chance to develop a reflective mind.

3. Time and issue management is always a challenge. You may have the day planned out and something may come along to take up the next two weeks. You may also have the occasional on-call support.

4. Mental and physical challenges. It may be a struggle for some not to become cynical, burned out, or have health issues.

In summary, Software Support is not for everyone. But for those that enjoy its numerous rewards, it can be a very rewarding career.

[Thanks to the folks at Pixabay for their fine free images.]

A journal entry from a 9-year old girl.

"Dear Diary

 Today was such a hard day. We were going to visit Grandma and Grandpa which is always FUN!!! We were taking a BIG plane. To get to the plane we went to an airport. It was so pretty with many colors, sounds, and things to see. I just wanted to look at each one of the places we passed because they were so fascinating. But Daddy kept screaming and pulling at me, 'C'mon Penelope, we have five minutes to get to the plane.' It seemed SO UNFAIR. I just wanted to stay and explore. But no, we had to rush. Now, I will never know what I missed."

Introduction

The hyphen between our birth and death years is what constitutes our life. Along the way, we make many choices on how we live it. An often overlooked selection is *do we come from a viewpoint of scarcity or one of abundance*?

Many things happen in our world from a scarcity viewpoint. Television content is spoken at accelerated speed. Headlines talk about the impending lack of resources. Multiple things need resolution NOW. And our lives are overbooked to the max between sunrise and sunsets.

If we follow a path of scarcity, there is eventually regrets about lack of something or other. We wonder where the time was spent between all the rushing here and there. We may be more productive in one sense. But life may seem to be unfulfilling. We may recognize the discomfort but keep on doing the same old same old.

Is Abundance a Real Possibility?

If we follow a life of abundance, then...

* You don't schedule things back to back. You allow things to take as much time as they require for resolution.
Tasks and meetings may take longer or shorter than expected.
* You allow time to look at alternatives and distractions which may lead to a stronger result.
* You are kinder to yourself as well as others.
* You are more likely to have higher sense of satisfaction and accomplishment.
* You are less likely to have the baggage of disappointment from not meeting pre-conceived expectations. There is also less fatigue and disorientation from overscheduling.
* There is more time for silence, deliberation, needed kindness to yourself, and reflection.

Can such a lifestyle be achieved during much of the 12 hour work day? I believe that it can if you keep working at it. Just raising the question opens us to infinite possibilities.

Conclusion

As I create this article, I have no outline in front of me. There is no expectation on how long it will take or how many words it will contain.

I just write and revise as many times as needed while listening music that also has a sense of spaciousness.

This is my last article in a loose series of articles of thriving in these challenging times. I plan to shortly put these in a PDF for distribution. Keep watching this space for availability.

Please let me know if they have been helpful and share your survival techniques