

A New Beginning

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Tuesday was the last day Microsoft had a chance to ruin my day. There I was, making a widget for the _____ project I'm working on, when Internet "Explorer" decided to explore the depths of my patience. After the third crash, I slammed the mouse down on my desk. The plastic logo fell off the mouse, jarred loose by my carelessness. The word looked up at me, mocking me in a rather Gatesian way. It read, quite simply, "Microsoft."

Microsoft. Microsoft. Microsoft. Why was I still here, working for _____, helping the man get richer using the bigger man's tools? I would never get rich working here, building the aforementioned widgets and doo dads and sprockets and the like for The Client. I would never meet The Client unless I got that Ultra Mega Super Top Secret (that's the UMSTS for you Navy boys) Clearance (which requires both a four day torture style interrogation followed by a "tactical insertion" into enemy territory, the likes of which would have Survivor contestants begging for their flint and treasure maps).

I would never have the opportunity to sit down with the customer and ask them what they felt when they used my software. Did they cry, as I easily could have over the frustrations writing it? Did they smile to themselves when the damned thing just wrote the ASCII characters to the stream after they depressed and then released the left mouse button over my most beautifully crafted widget, the one I call The Widget?

That's right about when I snapped. You know the feeling you have when you're about to make one of those life changing decisions and you feel yourself moving in a certain direction? It's like the whole thing has already been mapped out for you, and you finally saw the light coming from the huge neon lights pointing you toward your destination. It just felt right.

So what did I do next? Excellent question. A bit obvious perhaps, but very appropriate.

I got up, locked my workstation like a good protector of sensitive information, and marched right over to my boss's cube, which is actually only about three feet away. So I started marching from way back in the damp recesses of my own cube, so I could really build up some speed. I wanted to be moving once I got there, just so I could look I came a long way to tell him the important news.

As soon as I opened my mouth I realized what an incredibly stupid thing I was doing. But at that exact moment in time I was figuratively clubbed to death by vengeful baby seals, and as I floated above my lifeless but still very animated body, I could only watch the horror unfold.

I both watched and floated steadily as my mouth began spewing out all these horribly misplaced words. They included words very much like unhappy, dreams, goals, thanks, appreciate, and most of all, quit.

Apparently I wanted to become a writer. I wanted to work at home, writing the next Gatsby, full of adventure and intrigue and cliché and buxomly witty starseekers and god what am I saying oh please make it stop.

But it was much, much too late for that. I watched as my right hand shook my boss's and walked away. Well, first there were the 45 painful minutes of watching my body shut down the server and check in those files I spent the morning writing. And then it had to make a couple of calls and see if _____ wanted me to apply that patch before I left or just email him the files. Oh, I almost forgot about the 401K and seeing how I get that transferred over to my Schwab account and, of course, my security debriefing. Finally it left the building and allowed me to rejoin it.

Halfway home I let out the biggest howl/laugh/scream thing I had ever heard, and then I sat in silence as I drove on autopilot home. It never occurred to me what I was going to tell Jess, or how I was going to pay for the new car, or what if I just made the biggest mistake of my life. There was just one thought in that little gray whatchamacallit upstairs: should I get the Black Iced Tea or the Caramel Apple Cider at Starbucks?

So here I am, jobless, probably close to homeless, living the life of a writer. Mostly I play on the Internet, reading about stuff and bookmarking it for future reference. Found a site this morning that would go great for my poker book. Speaking of poker, you wouldn't believe the hand I lost today. I had two aces dealt to me, and this guy caught his third jack on the river. Unbelievable. But anyway, high time I get back to writing. I'm excited. I'm finally going to do it. I'm going to be the next Fitzgerald, Zelazny, Shelley, Herbert, or Tolkien.

And if you believed any of that, I'm well on my way.