



Let's Not Learn by Trial and Error

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Education has always been high on my list of personal and career goals. Over the years, my parents, who are retired schoolteachers, have helped me see

the fun in learning and the importance of learning to be the best you can be. Though family commitments make it difficult to go to school in addition to work, I often find training opportunities in the workplace to fit my schedule and career goals.

But it is not just the love of learning that motivates me. I know that if I do not continually engage in training, my technical skill set will quickly become obsolete. The fast pace of progress in software technology leaves me no other option; I have to educate myself continually in the latest techniques and products.

Organizations generally recognize that they cannot afford to rest on their employees' laurels any more than I can—successful strategies today may not be

useful tomorrow. For this reason, the implementation of a solid training program is imperative to continued success.

But training is not something to be left to chance. In the words of Watts Humphrey, "Training must be planned, funded, scheduled, and required" (*Managing the Software Process*, Addison-Wesley, 1989). The core of most workplace training programs comprise formal educational environments—workshops, classes, seminars. Regular employee involvement in these opportunities yields significant returns on investment. Any manager who believes that cutting the cost of training is a good way to save money will find projects going over budget when early mistakes have to be corrected in late stages of production. As Paula Shafer points out, "the cost of good training is lower than the cost of not training or of training poorly" (page 6). Time and money is wasted when we learn by trial and error.

Formal, organization-level education should also be supplemented by

individual study. Most work environments today provide access to the World Wide Web—a new dimension in educational and distance learning opportunities. I am continually impressed by the power of the Web and the library it puts at our fingertips. A fine example is the Software Technology Support Center's Web site (<http://www.stsc.hill.af.mil>). Here you will find many software engineering educational aids and additional links to other defense software engineering sites (<http://www.stsc.hill.af.mil/websoft.html>).

Employees need to inform their management of their training needs. When possible, the employer should furnish employees with whatever they need to sharpen their technical tool set. Whether you take a TOPGUN approach to training (page 3) or you keep up with the latest trends via the Internet, we at *CROSSTALK* wish you success in improving your skills and in meeting your educational goals. ♦



CROSSTALK Needs Your Feedback, Letters

We at *CROSSTALK* thank all those who participated in our December reader survey. We appreciate the comments and suggestions offered; we are especially grateful for the kudos. The statistics provided by this survey will go a long way toward helping us determine what our readership needs and wants.

However, the final tally has not yet been calculated (surveys still arrive every day), so there is still ample time to complete the survey if you have not already done so. If you did not receive the December 1997 issue, or if the copy you have

is missing the survey, you will find it on-line at <http://www.stsc.hill.af.mil/XTalkSurvey.asp>.

One of the preliminary results of our survey shows that readers enjoy the Letters to the Editor column. If you have read an article in *CROSSTALK* and feel that you have something to add to an author's words (or if you disagree with them altogether) please take the time to compose a brief letter and send it to the senior editor, Sandi Gaskin, at gaskins@software.hill.af.mil. Though brief, these succinct opinion pieces clarify issues and raise important questions. Please don't hesitate to make your voice heard.