



I Want My BACKTALK Back

I just received notice from CROSSTALK's managing editor requiring a BACKTALK article for the December issue. Now!

I apologize in advance for the lack of preparation. A previous message indicated that BACKTALK was covered, and Dr. Cook and I could take a couple of issues off. In reviewing the message, the two issues were January and February, and I'm on the line for December.

No problem. I've had short deadlines before. I work well under pressure. Let the creative juices flow from the cortex to the fingers through the keyboard to the screen past the editor to the page.

Wait, what does the last sentence of the message say?

"It needs to be short, as we are printing the article index – so about half of what you typically write."

Are you kidding me? They are cutting BACKTALK short for an article index? Do they really think CROSSTALK readers wait with baited breath to meticulously browse the article index? Do they realize this is the 21st century and indexes belong on the Web?

It needs to be short? Meetings need to be short. Commercials need to be short. Queues need to be short. Computer start-up times need to be short, not BACKTALK. It's already concise and to the point.

Would they treat Gustave Eiffel this way? "Hey Gustave, beautiful tower, can you make that half as high? We don't want to distract the tourists ... merci."

They obviously got to da Vinci. "Hey Leonardo, here's an offer you can't refuse. I want Mona's beaming smile diluted to a half a grin ... grazie."

Half of what I typically write? Would you ask Dennis Miller for half a rant; Krispy Kreme for half a doughnut; Britney for half a rehab – okay, I'll give you that; Lance for half an effort; the Wizard for half a brain, heart, or courage? Would you ask Al Gore for half a carbon footprint? Wait, we did and he won't. Hey, there's an idea, if I buy an *article index offset* can I take more space for BACKTALK?

I understand half the calories, half the wait, or a half-off sale, but half a BACKTALK makes no sense. What are they thinking? Can you imagine the CROSSTALK boardroom conversation? "We need space for the annual article index. Where can we find space?"

"What about BACKTALK?"

Sting faintly singing: *I want my BACKTALK back.*

Synthesizer, drums, guitar. Dire Straits sings:

Look at them yo-yo's, that's the way to do it;

You write BACKTALK for all to see.

That ain't workin', that's the way you do it,
Article for nothing and your kicks for free.

Now that ain't workin',

That's the way you do it,

Let me tell ya – them guys ain't dumb
Maybe get a blister on their little finger

Maybe get a blister on their bum

We gotta install article indexes,
Custom issue deliveries

We gotta move that impersonator,
We gotta move that Ph.D.

Sting boldly singing: *I want my, I want my, I want my BACKTALK back.*

Let's be honest: We all know that nine out of 10 CROSSTALK readers turn to BACKTALK straight away for wit, indulgence, and inspiration. While the Publisher's Note introduces the issue, BACKTALK sets the tone – warming up a reader's mind in preparation for the technical feast inside. If they think they can get away with a half-baked BACKTALK ...

Knock, knock, knock.

Pardon me a moment to get the door.

Yes? Excuse me, are you arresting me? What have I done? What have I done? What have I done! You're arresting me? Whoa, whoa, get off me. Get off me! Help! Why are they arresting me? What did I do? Get off me! Get off me! I didn't do anything!

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We now return to your regularly scheduled (half) BACKTALK (soft, soothing elevator Muzak).

— Gary A. Petersen

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MONTHLY COLUMNS

| ISSUE | COLUMN TITLE | AUTHOR |
|---|--|--|
| Issue 1: January Publisher's Choice | Sponsor: Unit Compliance Inspection: What Did We Learn? Publisher: Choose Your Favorite BackTalk: One If By LAN, Two If By C | Diane E. Suchan Elizabeth Starrett Dr. David A. Cook |
| Issue 2: February CMMI | Sponsor: Axiomatic Improvement BackTalk: Hippocrates and the Oath | Randy B. Hill Gary A. Petersen |
| Issue 3: March Software Security | Publisher: Collaborating for Secure Software BackTalk: Project Management Using Random Events | Elizabeth Starrett Dr. David A. Cook |
| Issue 4: April Agile Development | Sponsor: "Lead, Follow, or Get Out of the Way" BackTalk: (Un) Due Diligence | Kevin Stamey Dr. David A. Cook |
| Issue 5: May Software Acquisition | Sponsor: Being a Smart Buyer BackTalk: Who Are Those Guys? | Tony Guido Gary A. Petersen |
| Issue 6: June COTS Integration | Sponsor: Navigating the COTS Sea BackTalk: COTS: Commercial Off-The-Shelf or Custom Off-The-Shelf? | Diane E. Suchan Wiley F. Livingston, Jr., P.E |
| Issue 7: July Enabling Technologies for Net-Centricity | Sponsor: Delivering the Power of Information BackTalk: Net-Centric Virtuosity | General James E. Cartwright Gary A. Petersen |
| Issue 8: August Stories of Change | Sponsor: The Right Way to Change BackTalk: Common Threads in Life | Norman R. LeClair Glenn Booker |
| Issue 9: September Service-Oriented Architecture | Publisher: SOA Provides Opportunities and Challenges BackTalk: Evolution in Action – Building Up to a Service-Oriented Architecture | Elizabeth Starrett Dr. David A. Cook |
| Issue 10: October Systems Engineering | Sponsor: Revitalization of Systems Engineering Within the Department of Defense and the Expanding Role of Software BackTalk: Softwareitaville | Dr. John W. Fischer Gary A. Petersen |
| Issue 11: November Working as a Team | Sponsor: Working as a Team BackTalk: SSMART Team Management | Kevin Stamey Dr. David A. Cook |
| Issue 12: December Software Sustainment | Publisher: Software Sustainment or Maintenance? BackTalk: I Want My BACKTALK Back | Elizabeth Starrett Gary A. Petersen |