



# Tackling Software Measurement? Try Proverbs.

Most of us grew up with proverbs. As adults they are part of the vocabulary we use in everyday life. So why not consciously apply them when we encounter work challenges such as implementing change? As a starting point, let's consider some proverbs for overcoming measurement issues, and also look at a few that could be dangerous:

## Don't Cry Over Collected Data

This twist on the proverb, "Don't cry over spilt milk," is commonly encountered with measurement. Collected data represents a situation as it already *is* or *was in the past*. Instead of fixating on how bad the results look today, we need to focus on what can be done to improve on them. In fact, the worse the data shows today, the more opportunities abound for tomorrow's improvement.

## Those Who Cannot Remember the Past Are Condemned to Repeat It

Albert Einstein talked about insanity in a similar manner as this proverb infers when he said that insanity is equal to doing the same thing repeatedly and expecting different results. On projects, we often lapse into the same patterns of behavior and yet expect different results. The key to improvement is to change something in the process and then anticipate different results.

## Graphs Speak Louder Than Words

This is a spin on the proverb, "Actions speak louder than words." People often will believe visual factual data more than spoken words. For example, it is easier to dismiss as conjecture a manager who asks for a budget increase for maintenance work, than a graph objectively proving why a budget increase is justified based on the increasing user base.

## All That Glitters Is Not Gold

Don't be fooled by appearances. This proverb applies aptly as it is and works together with the graphical presentation of data. Just because a graph looks *pretty* or infers certain information in the pres-

entation, be careful to ensure that the data is true before taking corrective action. Although some data or measurement information might appear to be valuable, it might actually be quite worthless unless it is collected properly, consistently, and serves to assist in meeting a measurement goal.

## Level 5 Wasn't Reached in a Day

This modified proverb was originally, "Rome wasn't built in a day." While management and information technology (IT) people may grow impatient to reach Level 5 of the Capability Maturity Model® (CMM®) or CMM Integration<sup>SM</sup>, it is worthwhile to manage the expectations and realize that measurement benefits won't happen overnight.

## Knowledge Is Power

This proverb is perfect in its original state. When we know where we are doing well and where we're not so good, we can move in the direction of positive improvement. The knowledge of where change is needed versus guessing and trying *is* powerful.

Now, let's look at those proverbs that are best avoided when starting measurement:

## Cleanliness Is Next to Goodliness

This is an adaptation of the proverb, "Cleanliness is next to godliness." While process improvement and measurement should be planned, you don't need to perfect every measurement process before you can begin it. We need data consistency, relevancy (aligned with realistic goals and questions), and data applicability (tied to why measure), but if we wait for perfection, we'll lose valuable opportunities for improvement.

## Easy Come, Easy Go

When money comes to you easily (given or found), you do not value it and often spend it foolishly. This proverb applies when measurement projects are funded as a pet project, rather than a wise investment by the organization itself. When

measurement (or process improvement) funding is wasted by measuring for measurement's sake, it defeats the whole purpose and minimizes potential gains. Don't let this happen to your measurement initiative.

## Ignorance Is Bliss

Perhaps this proverb is best left to the domain of parenting – but in measurement and process improvement it is often what *you don't know* that causes problems and results in rework.

## Misery Loves Company

Who hasn't heard this one time and time again? While unhappy IT people may be a comfort to other unhappy IT people, we know it takes cooperative people to gain success in measurement.

Proverbs chosen properly for IT measurement initiatives can help direct or explain positive outcomes. I believe that *there is safety in numbers* – especially if those numbers turn into objective evidence that support IT initiatives.

— Carol A. Dekkers  
Quality Plus Technologies, Inc.  
dekkers@qualityplustech.com

## Can You BACKTALK?

Here is your chance to make your point, even if it is a bit tongue-in-cheek, without your boss censoring your writing. In addition to accepting articles that relate to software engineering for publication in CROSSTALK, we also accept articles for the BACKTALK column. BACKTALK articles should provide a concise, clever, humorous, and insightful perspective on the software engineering profession or industry or a portion of it. Your BACKTALK article should be entertaining and clever or original in concept, design, or delivery. The length should not exceed 750 words.

For a complete author's packet detailing how to submit your BACKTALK article, visit our Web site at <[www.stsc.hill.af.mil](http://www.stsc.hill.af.mil)>.