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# A Tale of Two Developers

*It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way.*

—Charles Dickens

Dickens, introduction to *A Tale of Two Cities* could easily have been describing a tale of two software developers where wisdom, foolishness, hope, and despair reside in the same industry, organization, and projects. There are two factions in the software development community. They differ in thought, style, and process and are often at odds, yet dependent upon one another.

In one corner are disciplined designers, in the other are free-form programmers. Don't let the names mislead you. The designers program, and the programmers design. They share a passion for developing software but their methods and attitudes are as different as a skier is to a snow boarder on the alpine slopes.

In my college days there was only one way to glissade down a slope of white powder and that was with two planks – one on each foot. It was fresh, challenging, exhilarating, and the only thing that changed from year to year was the color of your parka and lift ticket prices.

As I grew older a new wave swept across the peaks and onto the slopes: baggy clothes, multi-colored hair, and the two planks were fused into one fat board. It was called shredding, and it was everything skiing was not. Skiing had become a safe, tidy, aristocratic sport full of rules and regulations. Shredding was free, open, and rebellious. A skier's herky-jerky turns down steep slopes were the antithesis of the boarder's fluidity; the two worlds did not mix.

Likewise, in my college days there was only one way to develop software and that was creative free-form. No rules, you choose the tools, damn the fools approach. We were pioneers, and it was exhilarating. Little did we know that the hardware limitations we complained about actually

saved us from mass chaos.

Now a new wave sweeps across the cubicles and onto the software scene. Dress is suit and tie, hair combed, and discipline is the name of the game. Its roots are in the industrial quality movement, and it is everything free form is not. Free form has become unsafe, untidy, and ignorant as hardware limitations disappeared and complexity skyrocketed. Disciplined designers are prepared, methodical, and stuffy. The two worlds do not mix.

Back on the slopes another subtle but startling trend has arrived. Snowboarders bored by the ease of riding are strapping on skis. Skiers like Johnny Mosely are taking more air and stomping more radical jumps than borders. I donned a fat plank when my son picked up the sport and found a new exhilaration. The line drawn in blood between skiers and boarders is fading, giving way to increasing mutual respect. There is a new prestige associated with "multi-glissers" who can exploit a slope in any gear, under all conditions, at any time.

Perhaps our fellow bit benders could learn something from the alpine armistice. Software zealots and rebels who share the same passion are blind to the complimentary talents each hold. We are no longer trying to get *hello* on the terminal screen. Today's massive and complex software projects require both discipline and creativity. We should respect and cultivate a new breed of software developer who apply creativity and discipline to any project, on any platform, at the right time.

Will that happen before I prevail over "Grizzly," the 2001 Olympic downhill run at Snowbasin, Utah? Let the games begin.◆

— Gary Petersen, Shim Enterprise Inc.