



## About the Author

**Deb Jacobs** leads the Project Engineering Management Group at Priority Technologies. She has 26 years of experience working in the Information Technology industry. She began her career in the Air Force as a technician working with computers on B-52's and KC-135s. After completing her bachelor's degree in computer science she continued working with the information technology industry in a broad range of areas, including software engineering, process engineering, and project management. One of her most notable successes was leading the team responsible for achievement a rare CMM Level 3 rating in record time. Jacobs is chairwoman for the CERT Conference Committee; is newsletter editor/originator of the Omaha SPIN Newsletter, SPINOUT; and works with the SEI on the integrated Capability Maturity Model.

Priority Technologies Inc.  
1508 JF Kennedy Drive, Suite 101  
Bellevue, Neb. 68005  
Voice: 292-1212  
Fax: 292-1215  
E-mail: djacobs@prioritytech.com

### Get Your Free Subscription

Fill out and send us this form.

OO-ALC/TISE

5851 F Ave., Bldg 849, Rm B-04

Hill I AFB, UT 84056-5713

Attn: Heather Winward

Fax: 801-777-5633 DSN: 777-5633

Voice: 801-586-0095 DSN: 586-0095

Or use our online request form at

[www.stsc.hill.af.mil](http://www.stsc.hill.af.mil)

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

RANK/GRADE: \_\_\_\_\_

POSITION/TITLE: \_\_\_\_\_

ORGANIZATION

OR COMPANY: \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

BASE/CITY: \_\_\_\_\_

STATE: \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_

VOICE: \_\_\_\_\_

FAX: \_\_\_\_\_

E-MAIL: \_\_\_\_\_@\_\_\_\_\_

BACK ISSUE(S) REQUESTED

## Incredible Suckers

After wrestling for supreme control of the remote the other night, I sat down for some nightly entertainment with my son Matthew. Jumping from channel to channel we searched for a program we both liked. He tossed out "Behind the Music" and I eliminated "The Wild Thornberrys." He scoffed at "SportsCenter" and I vetoed "Doug." We both gagged on "Friends." Finally we hit PBS as the host of "Nature" introduced the program:

*"A decade of discoveries has revealed the extraordinary possibility that the prime intelligences in the ocean may not be the swimming mammals (whales and dolphins), but instead a race of "incredible suckers, the cephalopods."*

A bag of pretzels, a drink, and suckers . . . count me in. Venturing into the world of chambered nautilus, cuttlefish, octopus, and squid we had found a common interest—gooey squishy things that think.

Halfway through the program and the bag of pretzels, a marine biologist introduced the blue ring octopus, one of the smallest but most deadly of the cephalopods. There was a ring of familiarity as he described the effects of the blue ring's bite.

*"The bite of the blue ring is not much of a bite at all. In most cases you don't even know you have been bitten. It is rare to find a puncture wound or the site of the wound. It is almost like they force or inject toxin through the skin. However it administers the toxin, it is effective."*

*The symptoms of the bite of the blue ring octopus are incredibly consistent. First you feel a kind of numbness around your mouth and lips. Then it becomes very difficult to breathe, followed by a general paralysis of your body. Your knees wobble, you collapse, and you lay on the ground with your eyes fixed and dilated, totally unresponsive to everything around you. You cannot move a muscle. The weird thing, though, is that your mind remains relatively clear. You can hear, understand, and remember what everyone around you is saying. It probably does not help to hear things like, "that chap's had it."*

Having never encountered a blue ring octopus, I was curious as to why the symptoms of the blue ring bite were so familiar. Unsuspecting bite, numbness around the mouth, difficult to breathe, paralysis, eyes fixed and dilated, yet your mind remains clear? Staff meeting!

That's it, he's describing the symptoms of a staff meeting—not just any staff meeting but the dreaded Blue Ring Meeting (BRM). The BRM is a gathering with no purpose, leadership, control nor participation. A rendezvous in which otiose information, that could be sent in a quick e-mail message, is stretched over hours of excruciating tedium. A parley for colleagues to out-feign each other's interest in such tedium. It is an event in which you commonly sight lockjaw, doodling, drooling, and the amazing vertical snooze.

They appear to be like any other meeting. You seldom feel the sting, but once bitten it is over. Your mind is clear but you can not move a muscle. Thoughts run rampant. You devise little games to maintain a sense of coherent understanding but it is a losing battle. Try to take some action or cut the meeting short and the BRM embraces you with its tentacles and sucks the life out of you.

If you survive the dreaded BRM, which most of us do, there is one terrible side effect. You start holding your own Blue Ring Meetings. Even though you despised the experience, the helplessness, and the pain you pass the experience of the BRM on. It is a vicious cycle. It is a horror of all horrors. BRMs propagate themselves.

How can we stop this malignant tryst? Many have tried, and there is a plethora of books, videos, and seminars on the subject. Maybe we should organize. Join SWEABRM—Software Engineers Against Blue Ring Meetings. We could organize a Million Engineer March. My advice, when your boss asks you how the meeting went, answer: "Incredible Sucker."

—Gary Petersen, Shim Enterprise Inc.