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The **Software Technology Support Center** was established at Ogden Air Logistics Center (AFMC) by Headquarters U.S. Air Force to help Air Force software organizations identify, evaluate, and adopt technologies that will improve the quality of their software products, their efficiency in producing them, and their ability to accurately predict the cost and schedule of their delivery. *CROSSTALK* is assembled, printed, and distributed by the Defense Automated Printing Service, Hill AFB, UT 84056. *CROSSTALK* is distributed without charge to individuals actively involved in the defense software development process.

Don't Forget the Feather Boa

The current upward trend in information technology (IT) salaries is great, right? Don't make me laugh myself into a coma. Statistics show you're still *way* underpaid. Do an apples-to-apples comparison of IT salaries with an equivalent field, such as professional basketball. A representative IT salary (Jeremy Needers, Web design intern, \$14,500) vs. a typical player's salary (Shaquille O'Neil, center, \$17 million) shows you're earning roughly 1,172 times less than you're worth.

It's not fair. Why should the players get so much more wealth and attention? Is it because they're more interesting than you? More charismatic? More exciting? A rarer commodity? And might I add, far, far better looking?

Maybe we shouldn't go there. But have you noticed that a typical IT team is strikingly similar to a typical NBA team? You've got one or two star prima donnas supported by some solid starters, some backups who contribute on-and-off bursts of genius, and a few bench-warmers who do little else but fill a roster spot.

Unlike the IT world, however, an NBA team's stars make *several times* the salary of the bench-warmers. If you're sick of watching your team's desk-warmer sneak out early in a nicer car than yours, it's time to learn from the pros how to set yourself apart as your team's franchise player. Follow the principles outlined below and you'll soon be the darling of your organization, handling your superiors with the media savvy and charm of Dennis Rodman (minus the dignity).

PUBLICITY. The popular media still hasn't caught on to the thrill of watching IT's design and coding all-stars do their magic. We can only dream they'll someday wake up and give both hoop and engineering heroes equal billing:

"Van Horn Scores 38 in 20T Nail-biter!"

"Pippen's 40-Foot Buzzer Beater Lifts Bulls over Knicks!"

"Smith's Design Review Finds Two Medium-Impact Errors! And He's Almost on Schedule!"

But the media remains out of touch—*everyone* knows Pippen plays for Houston now. Before IT gets better press, we'll have to equip offices with locker rooms where reporters can gather for an IT hero's scintillating post-milestone analysis:

"Y'know, we just went out there and programmed hard and let the algorithms come to us. We also did good following our game plan, y'know, and got some good coding off the bench. I think we just wanted it more. But I'm sick of carrying this project. I want \$15 million or a trade to a project that appreciates my abilities."

Until this happens, you must use your organization's own media. For example, insert subliminal self-promotion material into your E-mails. With skill, you can humbly, subtly position yourself as the key to all past and future successes:

"To management: Before I discuss our weekly report, I must respond to the praise that has been violently heaped upon me for my performance on the Foomber project, including praise from direct competitors who are now offering exorbitant sums for my talent and insider knowledge. In good conscience, I must humbly and publicly acknowledge that I couldn't have single-handedly turned the project into the gleaming, profitable organizational ensign it is today—in contrast to the fetid pool of yak sputum it was when I arrived—without the help of my well-intentioned but far less talented co-team members. For example, Ralph Nefderderder loaned me a sharpened pencil on several occasions . . ."

ENDORSEMENTS. Endorsement contracts give you the leverage of appearing popular and desirable. Endorse products associated with developers. (And I'll resist the temptation to take a job at developers by dredging up worn-out stereotypes. For example, I'd never suggest an ad with copy like, "Curaid-brand strips! They hold my glasses together twice as long as the leading brand!")

Instead, you could endorse something sexier, like pizza. Not that you'd need an endorsement contract with a pizza chain—you just need your managers to think you've got that kind of star power. If you're the computer whiz you claim to be, you should have no problem breaking into the local rag's ad department computer and modifying an ad to show a picture of yourself alone at your desk late at night, along with a snappy, subliminally self-promoting headline:

"When staying late at night redoing work done by bozos,

I make mission-critical, non-long-distance calls to Dominos!"

Use these techniques in the weeks before your next review cycle—who knows but that they'll help you get the additional \$1 million or \$2 million per year you desire? Have Dennis Rodman's promoter visit your office and give additional pointers. Be sure to warn him about the yak spit in the hallway. — Lorin May

Got an idea for BACKTALK? Send an E-mail to backtalk@stsc1.hill.af.mil