



Practice Makes Perfect

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When I hear the term practice, visions of my childhood emerge. Practice, practice, practice are the three words I often heard when it came to my extracurricular activities. I am sure most of you can relate. For example, did you take swimming lessons, tennis lessons, or attend basketball or baseball camp? Did your teacher or coach urge you to practice at least one hour a day? And do you remember your parents saying, "You can't expect to improve (or make the team) without practicing." Now that I am a parent, I also hear myself saying such things to my daughter as she takes tumbling and dance lessons.

Practice is a good thing. It makes us better performers. But what do you remember most about having to practice? It takes time, commitment, and energy. And didn't it seem that you always had something better to do, like watching television or playing video games?

However, I remember being envious of those that were the best. I wished I had the stamina to practice more and to be a better performer. I could only dream of what it would be like to make it to the Olympics. As we all know, the best of the best make it to that level. Whether it is swimming, diving, track, baseball, gymnastics, ice skating, or skiing, these athletes endure endless hours of training and practicing. Talent only takes you so far; it is the practice that makes you perfect.

I see similarities in the defense software community. Most

software managers working with tight schedules and budgets cringe at the time it can take for them and their teams to learn and implement best practices such as configuration management, risk management, metrics-based scheduling, inspections, or defect tracking. They question whether all this hard work and practice will pay off.

In a sports scenario, you can think of software managers as the coaches, software engineering process groups as the trainers, and software practitioners as the athletes. They must find the time to practice, to learn the skills, and to strive towards repeatability. By showing up to practice and learning key process techniques, these teams will be the winners at acquiring, developing, and sustaining software. By embracing and institutionalizing software best practices, they will continue to be the winners. And they will be tough competitors in the software arena. Won't they also be the ones sporting a Level 5 patch on their uniforms?

In this month's issue, several articles convey the importance of process improvement and institutionalizing software best practices. In keeping with our mission, we invite you to also share practices that have paid off for your team or organization in a future *CrossTalk* issue. Send articles or comments to us at stsc.custserv@hill.af.mil. Also, if you need assistance with learning best practices, the Software Technology Support Center is here to help — see this month's insert. And remember to practice, practice, practice. ♦

CrossTalk Would Like to Ask You a Question

What was the best and/or worst software technology innovation of the 20th century?

Respond in writing at:

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We want to hear from you, so if for some reason your e-mail response did not go through, please re-send to the above address or contact us by fax or post. We will print your responses in our special December issue dedicated to the Evolution of Software Technology.



On the cover: Salt Lake graphic artist Shannon W. Ison illustrates this month's software best practices theme through an old-fashioned rendition of two boys practicing baseball skills, one wearing their idol's jersey.

Ison specializes in airbrush and computer illustration. He was the first artist to be commissioned to create limited edition Winter Olympic skis and snowboards and for the past 10 years has been the art director at a ski company in Salt Lake city where he has created one-of-a-kind handpainted skis and snowboards.