

Take Time to “Sharpen Your Saw”

Perspective from the Top



In 1989, author Stephen R. Covey published an inspirational book called the “The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People.” In this book, Covey offers self-help methods for solving personal and professional problems. The seven habits provide a step-by-step path to follow that covers everything from being proactive to always thinking with a “win/win” mindset.

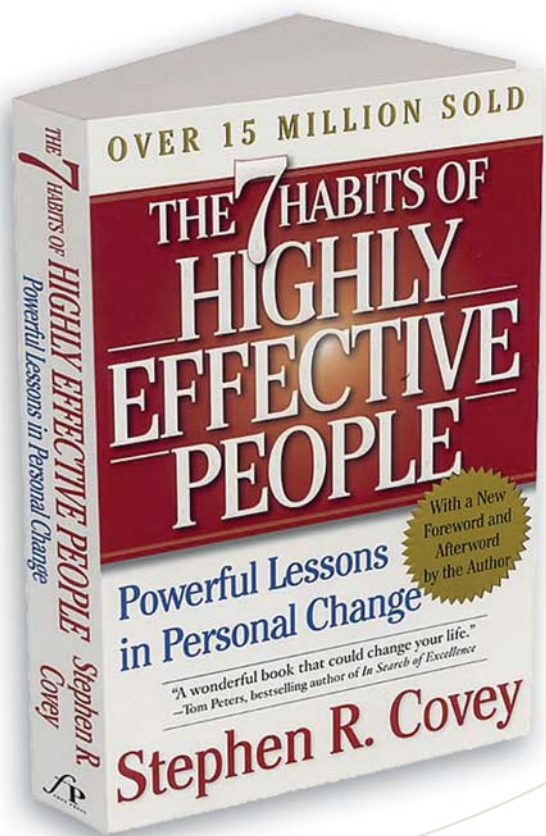
The seventh habit, “Sharpening the Saw,” focuses on the principles of balanced self-renewal. It stresses continuous improvement and learning to “sharpen” your mind. As professionals, we should never stop learning or trying to better ourselves. When we begin to falter in this area is when our competition steps in and takes over.

In this spirit, and based on your feedback in a recent survey, we’ve decided to implement a certification preparation program to assist our consultants in securing industry certifications. Epitalk is a strong believer in the need for continual education and training. We invest \$1,000 per employee/per calendar year for those wishing to obtain additional certification or training, and we are pleased to add this benefit. With the help of Epitalk employees that teach at various educational institutions throughout the area, including University of Phoenix, Walsh College and Wayne State University, we’ve developed a cost-effective method for offering additional training to our staff to help them earn industry certifications.

We have received a great deal of positive responses and have identified that the pilot course for the program will be a Project Management Institute (PMI) certification class. The idea is that through the certification classes, Epitalk employees will be better prepared and have a higher success rate when taking certification tests. I urge each and every one of you to take advantage of the opportunities around you to learn, be more productive and bring greater value to our customers.

Competition in our industry is becoming increasingly more intense. Competition not only comes from competing businesses, but also from other consultants in the field, specifically the skills and certifications they possess. Certifications, when applicable, are a solid way to distinguish our employees from the rest of the industry.

Program details are being finalized and additional information will be available later this summer. Please forward any feedback or suggestions to jpsheppard@epitalkgroup.com.



Bicycle and Sunlight = Mobile Internet?

Sounds strange, but it’s true. A nonprofit company, Inveneo, has developed a low-energy, Linux-based computer that is powered by bicycle and solar energy. The technology was developed to bring Internet and VoIP to poor villages in rural areas of Africa and Asia.

Inveneo cofounders, Mark Summer and Robert Marsh, first created a wireless system for Laos villagers in 2003 while volunteering for a nongovernmental organization. Their purpose was to use this technology to provide local, national and international phone use to remote areas.

To date, they have installed computer stations in four isolated villages, including the Bukuuku region of Uganda, which is home to nearly 3,200 villagers. Each computer is wired to an analog telephone and a Wi-Fi antenna, which transmits the Internet signal to a central location at one of the villages. The system comes equipped with 80-watt solar panels and an optional bicycle-powered generator that can provide power when sunlight is not available. The Inveneo system has a price tag of \$1,995.

The Inveneo technology has already begun to attract attention from big-name IT companies such as Intel and Wyse Technologies. Next on the company’s list – other regions of Uganda, as well as additional countries in Sub-Saharan Africa.

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The Podcast Revolution

Whether you're at the gym, commuting to work or traveling on a plane, it's not uncommon to see someone listening to their iPod. The question is, what are they listening to – music or a podcast?

Podcasting, a combination of iPod and broadcasting, is a method of publishing and distributing electronic files and making them available (usually for free) on the Internet. Users can download and listen to podcasts on their personal computers or portable audio players. Podcasting's goal is to create content (audio or video) for an audience that wants to listen or watch when they want, where they want, and how they want.

How are businesses using the advantages of podcasts today? Thirty percent of companies with \$50 million or more in revenue have the ability to podcast, and another 28 percent intend to offer this type of technology within the next year. This creates a new medium that expands beyond traditional communication methods. Podcasts can provide brief business updates, new product announcements or even give details on an upcoming meeting directly from company spokespeople. Additionally, podcasts are being used for new hire orientations and company and product training.

Locally, companies are integrating podcasting into marketing and communication initiatives. DaimlerChrysler provides weekly podcast features from its TheFirehouse.biz company media blog. The State of Michigan and Governor Granholm produce a weekly podcast from her radio broadcasts for download at www.michigan.gov. Colleges and universities are getting involved with



Apple's iPod debuted in 2003

podcasts. The University of Michigan's Dental School allows students to download classroom lectures, transfer information onto an iPod or an MP3 player, and then listen to the lectures at home or walking around campus. Ford also has experimented with podcasting, and just started providing consumers interested in Ford's mid-sized Fusion with a 10-minute in-depth podcast highlighting "kick-the-tires" information on the car's interior and exterior features.

New technologies are being developed all the time to meet increasing podcast needs. On the software front, Apple has added podcasting capabilities into its iTunes software. Now iTunes can be set up to download podcasts that consumers have subscribed to automatically on a daily basis.

In the hardware department, Sony's new mobile digital recording device, PCM-D1, can record high-quality digital audio and has limited editing functions so podcasters can create Web-ready podcasts in the field without the need of a laptop or PC. Alesis, an audio gear and musical instruments company, has created podcasting kits that bundle together a microphone, mixer and recording management software. Everything needed to create a podcast except the computer.

The future of podcasting looks promising. Each day, more companies and consumers are adopting this form of mobile information sharing. Stay tuned; soon we'll be Podspeaking, Podwatching, Podtrading, and it won't be long before we have our first Poddating couple tying the knot.

To Blog or Not to Blog . . .

Weblog. Blog. Blogging. These terms are used every day. But understanding what a blog is and how it can help you in your job can be a bit of a mystery.

A blog is a web-based publication consisting primarily of periodic articles based on a particular topic and allows readers to comment, creating discussions. According to Technorati, a search engine that monitors blogs, there are more than 35 million blogs in existence and 80,000 new blogs are created each day. Today, blogs are being used by corporations as a means to communicate key messages, drive traffic to Web sites or garner consumer feedback. The media utilizes this medium to further disseminate the news. And, the general public have started blogging to voice their opinions and feelings on various topics.

No matter who you are, blogs are becoming a common tool. As a matter of fact, below are several informational blogs geared towards IT professionals that can be valuable resources. The blog entries contain current information on software and hardware trends, business strategies, and news and reviews of the industry.

CIO Managing Blogs (blogs.cio.com)

InfoWorld Blogs (weblog.infoworld.com/prodblog)

Technology Review: An MIT Enterprise
(www.technologyreview.com)

Information Technology Management Web
(www.itmweb.com/cgi-bin/blog/weblog.pl)

Technorati recently conducted a study on blogs and concluded that the number of existing blogs doubles every six months. With this rapid growth, it is certain that blogs will continue to challenge traditional media, and the industry will continue to evolve. Before you jump on the Internet and begin to blog, we encourage you to review The Epitec Group's blogging guidelines.

Blogging Responsibility

We encourage you to blog responsibly using the guidelines below.

There's more to it than you think

Before you write anything, take a look around and do some research to learn context and topical issues. Links are very important in blogs. If you see something interesting and relevant, include the link.

Don't reveal too much information

It's great to write about your work, but it's not okay to write about everything. Be smart – avoid writing about new business, financial information, confidential client information or any other trade secrets. Make it clear that the views expressed in the blog are yours alone and do not necessarily represent the views of your employer.

Be nice

As an employee, you are representing The Epitec Group as well as yourself. Don't post any material that is obscene, defamatory, profane, libelous, threatening, harassing, abusive, hateful or embarrassing to another person or entity.

And lastly, ensure that your blogging activity does not interfere with your work commitments.



IT Meets Flip-flops

The sun was shining, the birds were chirping and team members from The Epitec Group and the girls of Vista Maria were hard at work welcoming summer, or...maybe just having fun! On May 20, 2006, the company hosted a picnic extravaganza with plenty of food, games and crafts. The featured craft was flip-flop design and each girl was able to make her own fashion statement, which is sure to be a hit for the summer.

"This is our second event with Vista Maria," said Josie Sheppard, president, The Epitec Group. "We are so honored to be able to assist and interact with the girls. I feel we benefit as much as they do."

The Epitec Group supports Vista Maria's mission to successfully transition high-risk girls into adulthood and assist their reintroduction into the community by fostering emotional healing, providing a safe and stable environment, improving relationships, increasing personal competency and responsibility, and improving educational and vocational performance.



The Michigan Council of Women in Technology is focused on women entering the workforce and professionals that seek a community fostering cross-industry interaction and a technology driven spirit. Membership fee is \$85 for professionals and \$20 for students. Member benefits include discounted access to MCWT-sponsored corporate events, networking activities and specialized technology seminars. Member involvement supports the organization's outreach efforts, which include professional mentoring and scholarship programs. For more information, or to register online, please visit www.mcwt.com.

Please send any questions or comments to support@epitecgroup.com. Your input may become a topic in future issues of *Epitalk*.

Industry Insight

Sun Microsystem executive shares thoughts on Michigan's IT industry

The IT industry in Michigan is experiencing change. Some companies are seeing a great deal of opportunity, while others are facing many challenges. To take a closer look at the industry and some of the recent trends, we asked Rosemary Bayer, chief architect at Sun Microsystems, to share her insight. Rosemary has been in the industry for 22 years. In her current position, she provides technical oversight and leadership with a particular focus on strategic initiatives by utilizing innovative technologies such as network services and security.

Outside of her role at Sun, Rosemary participates in a number of local community organizations, including founding the Michigan Council of Women in Technology (MCWT).

Southeast Michigan's economy

Q: Considering the recent issues surrounding Michigan's economy, what is your prediction for the future of our state? How does Information Technology fit in?

A: Michigan will survive, and with some effort, will thrive again. However, we do have some work to do.

A number of recent studies and the Economic Policy Conference on Mackinac Island thoroughly examined some reasons why Michigan is in its current state. Chiefly, we have made no serious effort to educate and retrain our workforce from a manufacturing-based set of skills to skills which are more in line with what our economy needs in the 21st century. The theme is one about which I am passionate, as are many of my fellow IT associates, particularly in the MCWT.

Computer technology (hardware and software), networking, tele-communications, biotechnology, advanced automation processes and advanced engineering (including robotics) are all areas in which Michigan could be a leader. We all need to work together to find ways to retain the technical work force we have now who are looking for work outside the state and encourage our youth (particularly young women, who are still very "under-represented" in the technology ranks) to pursue math, science and technology education and careers.

Q: Do you believe that associations such as MCWT and Automation Alley can increase the potential for the technology field in Southeast Michigan?

A: No question. There are two major factors in this. First, there is an amazing thing that happens when a group of people from different companies and industries get together. Seeing your problem through someone else's eyes, or hearing about something that you never would

have guessed had relevance to the thing you are working on – it is an incredible opportunity.

The second factor is the focus on technology. MCWT has a clear and unparalleled mission to encourage women to enter and stay in the field of technology through mentoring, educational programs, and networking. The Foundation arm of MCWT is completely focused on growing our IT ranks by reaching out to girls (and women) of all ages with the tools to inspire and support them in technology education and career choices – tools like technology camp, high school and college clubs, scholarships, computers and more. This will not only provide a simple growth in numbers, it will assist in correcting the gender disparity currently apparent in IT and computer science.



IT Industry

Q: What obstacles do you anticipate IT professionals will face in the near future, and how do you suggest they overcome these obstacles?

A: I think the most common answer to that question today is outsourcing. If you get a chance to read Thomas Friedman's "The World is Flat," you will become excited about the possibilities that are open to us because of globalization and the technologies that enable it. We now have the chance to participate in work that is based anywhere, and collaborate with teams of people we would never have had the chance to meet without these enabling technologies.

The challenges that come along with this are both personal and industry or technology specific. We need to keep up, keep learning, and keep working on technical and communication skills. I still hear far too often how technical people don't understand the business – we can change this. We should be the drivers for change in our businesses, using technology to leap forward in whatever our companies or customers' companies do.

Technically, the flat world presents some new IT challenges around security, communications requirements, learning to make discrete units of work that can be done anywhere, anytime, and managing this globally. These challenges are opportunities for innovation, a chance for us to leap forward as individuals, companies and as a country.

Q: How do you suggest IT professionals overcome these obstacles?

A: Fearlessness and education.

Q: What is your opinion of current trends in the IT industry?

A: Wow, that is an extensive question. I could talk forever! Instead I'll mention two major trends in the IT industry right now.

Everything is connected. In the traditional IT business, this means boundless opportunity in putting together everything from mainframes to desktops to handhelds and connecting all the old systems with new workflow and network-based services. For the world at large, this means there is a new global community connected by the Net, with information available to people and to cultures that have been completely isolated until now. What could be more exciting than the opportunity to collaborate with a team that is spread across the planet?

"Any-sourcing." The notion of taking a piece of work and assigning it to someone anywhere – the best person for the job, the newest idea, the most exciting innovation, or just the person in the right time zone. Did you know there are people in a call center in Colorado who are taking orders at McDonald's drive-thrus in Missouri? Fabulous! We just need to learn how to manage it.

Consultant



Cindy Cottage

STATS

Title: Customer Engineer for Ford Motor Co.

Hire Date: July 2004

Responsibilities: Install network connectivity, troubleshoot connectivity problems globally, maintenance of hardware and cabling for one of Ford's data centers.

"I first joined the IT field because I had an interest in computers and the desire to help others. Eight years later, I truly believe that the potential in this industry is limitless as long as one's thirst for knowledge and willingness to adapt are strong."

iSpot Exclusive: Cindy recently received her CCNA certification.

Corporate Employee



Marre Tallerico

STATS

Title: Delivery Support

Hire Date: September 2002

Responsibilities: Resume modification and submittals, administrative activities, Epilink coordination, creation and maintenance of Epitec process maps.

"The Epitec Group is a learning-oriented environment that presents many opportunities to acquire fresh knowledge. In my position, I strive to be the best 'director of first impressions' to ensure clients and consultants feel welcome when they visit or call."

iSpot Exclusive: Marre is currently pursuing a bachelor's degree in business administration from Wayne State University.



Pictured above – Front Row: (L - R) Adil Nasser, Yahia Mawry, Luigi Morabito, Brian Baker, Tony Nicolo; Second Row: Chad LaPointe, Carl Williams, Bill Welz, Lee Glenn, Shane Burgess, Scott Leibold; Third Row: Eddie Harris, Ken Duda, Herman Pierce, James Emberton, Bill Dixon; Not Pictured: Sam Dbouk, Cory Kelley, Milton Fountain, Thomas Moore, Cindy Cottage, Jamila Willis

For more than 20 years Epitec has provided Ford Motor Company with intellectual talent. Our most recent success story and project win began in May 2006. After an extensive bid and proposal process, The Epitec Group earned Ford's Local Area Network Support Services contract.

Epitec quickly went to work as part of the Network Operations Group at Ford, working on high-visibility projects for the Telecommunications Services (TCS) team. Twenty-two talented professionals, including project leader, Brian Baker, provide the client several services including customer engineering, customer network analysis, network hardware inventory control and network change control.

The Epitec team is responsible for the physical layer of the network topology. On a daily basis, they perform cable patching, troubleshooting of network equipment and responding to break/fix issues. In addition, they are working on several major projects, including the deployment of an IP Telephony Project. This program will implement VoIP to the entire Ford campus in Dearborn as well as other national sites and is a consolidation of IT applications that will ultimately reduce telecommunication costs for the company. Baker commented, "Epitec has provided me with a lot of autonomy to lead this project. I am able to implement creative solutions in solving some of Ford's toughest IT challenges."

Milestones

April

Jeff Hunt (3 years)
Sharon Swope (3 years)
Christopher Hood (7 years)
Abiramasundari Palanirajan (7 years)
Michael Foley (8 years)
Thomas Csatai (9 years)

May

Brenda Johnson (5 years)
Charisse Smith (6 years)
Sharon Fike (8 years)

June

John Mikkola (3 years)
Chris Sulfridge (3 years)
Chris Moran (5 years)
Haifa Jolagh (7 years)
Jayne Doran (10 years)
Darryl Gay (11 years)



From Start To Finish, We're There For You.

535 Griswold Street
Suite 2500
Detroit, MI 48226