

The Art of Tech Support

John Abbott College

How to Build Bridges

To Your Users

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Communications With Clients

- Users as System Monitors
- Meetings with Users
- Persuasion and Attitude Change
- Other Means of Communication

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Users As System Monitors

- Users in best position to monitor system performance, functions
- Cooperate to improve services to clients
- Win-Win approach
- Rapid feedback may permit problem prevention
- Communication speeds problem resolution
- Increased support for IS from upper management

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Meetings with Users: Organizing

- Discussions with senior management first
- Preliminary survey, interviews
- Analyse complaints
- Prepare to deal with specific issues
- Study personal styles of key users
- Seminar/meeting with users in their offices
- Informal style: bring doughnuts, order coffee

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Meetings with Users: Agenda

- What operations do that helps or can help the user
 - many users have no idea of functions
 - present grid showing functional responsibilities
- Whom to contact for what kinds of help
 - give examples of the kinds of questions involved; e.g.,
 - Q: My terminal just gave a flash of light and now its screen is completely dark.
 - A: Call Jack at local 234.

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Meetings with Users: Agenda (cont'd)

- Why immediate comment is useful to system management
- System resource saturation
 - CPU, I/O, or memory hogs
 - Endless loops
 - Operating system problems
 - System abuse
 - On-line compiles
 - Production jobs that lock database during the day

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Meetings with Users: Agenda (cont'd)

How system management can correct problems fast for user

- Liberating or obtaining more resources
- Using operator or system management commands to stop abuse
- Assigning higher priority to an emergency procedure to help the client without disrupting other users

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Persuasion and Attitude Change

- Face-to-face persuasion works best
- Start with your most important arguments
- Weak attacks are counter-productive
- Appeals to fear don't work well
- Mild threats must be coupled to solutions
- Balanced messages are better than propaganda
- Repetition is important
- Rhetorical questions are dangerous
- Superficial cues are important

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Other Means of Communication

- A Friendly, Helpful Message System
- Electronic Bulletin Board
- Intranet Web Pages
- Tech Support Newsletters
- The Login Message

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A Friendly, Helpful Message System

Encourages more positive attitude towards the operating system, the computer and operations:

ENTER USER PASSWORD:
vs
Please enter user password:

UNKNOWN SYNTAX
vs
Pardon?

CAN'T INITIATE NEW SESSIONS NOW
vs
System Alpha not yet available--try again later

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A Friendly, Helpful Message System (cont'd)

- If possible, show what can be done to fix problem
- Explain WHO can do WHAT to help user in trouble
- Include telephone numbers

OUT OF DISC SPACE (FSERR 46).
vs
OUT OF DISC SPACE (FSERR 46).
Check :FREE for free space
Verify :BUILD or :FILE commands for typing error;
use 32 extents if possible; check device class;
call Ramesh @ (514) 234-5678 X.216 for help

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A Friendly, Helpful Message System (cont'd)

- Gives operators critical information fast
- Especially important when user gets system information

DCU LOGGING IN PROGRESS (THIS IS NORMAL)

MAKE LDEV 3 ONLINE RIGHT NOW: PRESS UNLOAD/LOAD

STREAMS FACILITY NOT ENABLED
Call operations for :STREAMS 10

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Electronic Bulletin Board

- Ideally, should be available from any terminal instantly
- Use electronic mail if no other mechanism available
- Displays using reverse chronological order -- most recent items first
- Documents procedures without necessarily printing paper

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Electronic Bulletin Board (cont'd)

Examples of bulletin board contents:

- Job priorities and logon IDs for faster processing
- Output spoolfile priorities for special treatment
- Requesting special services like Sunday operators
- Preventive maintenance schedule for all systems announcements
- New equipment profiles; e.g., New tape drive performance and effects on backup times
- Changes in production schedules

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Electronic Bulletin Board (cont'd)

- Patches to operating system, utilities, and other programs
- Requests for bug reports
- Tips for new users or on novel uses of system facilities
- Sample jobs for new services (e.g., Laser printing)
- How to save disc space using compression programs, proper blocking factors
- Information about new user-defined commands and routines

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Electronic Bulletin Board (cont'd)

Fostering discussion among users

- Set up your own support group
- Need *sysops*
 - read all messages
 - respond quickly and professionally
- Define sections for types of problems
- Need to support *threads*
 - chains and trees of related messages
 - encourage people to start new threads when topic changes
- Works well on Internet & on public or private Web Pages

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Intranet Web Pages

- Use internal "intranet" to make information available
- Content similar to that of BBS discussed above
- Can use hypermedia--sound, video
- Invent interactive quizzes and games about tech support

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Tech Support Newsletters for Users

News affecting users -- for those without electronic access

- Letter from Tech Support leader
- Roster of tech support contacts
- Staffing changes with pictures
- New features of software upgrades
- Network / System expansion plans
- Interesting case studies
- Interviews with key users

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The Login Message

- Short
- Newest before older
- Important before less important
- Old messages deleted after a week
- Useful information in header, trailer
- Legal requirements

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The Login Message (cont'd)

- This system is restricted exclusively to authorized users.
 - All other use will be prosecuted to the full extent of the law.
- This system may be monitored by authorized management.
- Welcome to JINBU CORP System Alpha
 - Shutdown 04:00, Startup 07:00
 - Batch Processing 18:00 To 04:00 Daily
- The system will be unavailable
 - this weekend between 08:00 and 20:00 on Sunday Nov 17.
 - Reason: reload to reduce disk space fragmentation.
- :JOURNAL last modified Sep 18th
- Please report all system anomalies to operations
 - (514) 234-5678 x. 216. Thank you.

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Homework: Readings in Wilson's text

- Read Chapter 6, "Alternative Methods of Support"
- Prepare a summary of the key points in this chapter
- Submit your summary at the start of lecture 6
- Hand in the answers to all review questions from the instructor after quiz at start of lecture 6

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