



obnoxious librarian from hades
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Published: 2008

Tag(s): humor, satire, office, dilbert, bureaucracy, library, librarians

The obnoxious librarian from hades

By Dennie Heye

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Praise for the obnoxious librarian from hades

This book touches on war, love, jealousy, and loss... it will propel the author into literary history.. no wait.. that was "Gone with the wind"

The New York Times Book Review

The thinnest book in the 817 section.

The Dewey Decimal Classification Fan Newsletter

Preface

When I was in Houston in June of 2006 at a library meeting, little did I know that one small brainwave would result in a book. I was listening to a PowerPoint presentation and my brain tends to wander around everything but the topic of the presentation.

One of my fellow librarians, Leah Bartlett had just started thinking out loud about the best way to draw attention to a blog which we thought about setting up. Leah suggested we would post something outrageous to generate discussion. That quickly led to the idea of creating some sort of obnoxious librarian character that would trigger reactions.

That brainwave went around in my brain and that same night I scribbled some notes for ideas. Then life got in the way and I forgot about the obnoxious librarian until a year later he resurfaced as an alter ego. For over ten years I have worked in large organizations and had my share of Dilbert-like experiences. The obnoxious librarian is my way of venting frustrations and amusing others at the same time.

The title and type of humor was inspired by the b*stard operator from hell, a legendary series of Usenet postings about a computer operator in the nineties.

A big thank you to: the Warrior Librarian , LISNEWS.org, Law Librarian Blog and libgig.com for promotion, my faithful readers who would like eternal fame: Penny Leach, Percy Flint, Erwin La Roi and all the others who enjoy my postings. This book is for you!

Major thanks to Paul Weemaes ¹ for editing the whole book – all remaining errors are mine.

Last but not least thanks to my wife for the cups of tea and biscuits during my writing sessions.

Find new updates on <http://olfh.blogspot.com> or buy the real book via <http://www.lulu.com/content/4253767>

1.He also has a law degree, so this book is now fully compliant with some laws.

The one where Kevin ruins my day

It is Monday morning, 9 a.m. in the library and the phone rings. This is a nuisance. I am just in the middle of re-writing the Dewey entry on Wikipedia (the entry now goes straight to an entry about an obscure American philosopher named John Dewey, but of course it should point straight to Melvil Dewey²) and now I have completely lost my train of thought. I let the phone ring three times as I don't want my "customers" (I am no longer allowed to call them lusers, which is short for library users) to think I have nothing better to do than answering their endless, irrelevant questions.

"Library" (with the proper curt tone in my voice)

"Hello, this is Kevin from sales. I cannot get access to the Wall Street Journal Online"

"Yes?"

"Well, I need to look up some stats for a presentation by the vice president before 10, so I need you to restore my access quickly".

I always hate it when people try to make their problem mine. To make sure our WSJ access is completely secure, I change the password every 3 days and then post it clearly on the intranet web page for everyone to see. Well, if they know how to find the page, as it is actually not linked from anywhere. And I use a white font on a white background. But for a real motivated user that should not be a problem, I think. I just want to discourage all the casual users, as all they do is hog the concurrent user licenses. Anyway, I want to get back to my important work task at hand so I need to get rid of Kevin.

"Well, Kevin, I just looked in my library system and you still have overdue reports listed here. I need you to return them before I can give you access to the Wall Street Journal."

"But... but... I only checked them out yesterday!"

"That is not what my library system says – you don't want to imply my system is wrong, do you?"

"No, of course not."

"Ok, well, then I'll see you here at the library at 3.30 when I have the scheduled report check-in time. Bye Kevin." {click

2. For the non-librarian readers: Melvil Dewey is the inventor of the Dewey Decimal Classification system, used widely in libraries across the world.

Just to be sure Kevin will not be a problem in the future, I quickly open the web content management system and start a blog in Kevin's name. At first I thought that being the solo librarian and web master in the company would be a burden, but it has its advantages. Kevin's new blog, which is featured prominently on the front page of our global intranet, is all about his praise for our competitor and how he would like to "expand his horizon" and "is ready for new opportunities". You bet Kevin will have an appointment with HR before he can say Wall Street Journal.

Back to my work on the Dewey wiki, as I need to finish that before I have my annual budget meeting. For some reason, all overhead departments must reduce their budget by 5% except for the library. Perhaps it was my note to the CFO ³ about his Google web history, which I stumbled upon in my role as corporate search strategy coordinator. For some reasons the CFO had non-business relevant queries in his account, which might lead a non-informed person to think he was looking for female companionship during evenings on his business trips.

3.CFO: Chief Financial Officer, or better said: the top bean counter in an organization.

The one where no book gets left behind

It is Tuesday evening 7 p.m. in the library and I look forward to my favorite task: the monthly overdue book raid. This is the time when I exercise my mandate to retrieve every overdue book and company file. And as corporate clean desk policy focal point, I use that same time to clean desks from non-work related items. I enjoy this task so much, I have to restrain myself from humming “The Ride Of The Valkyries” all the time.

For this monthly exercise I have:

- a dark blue windbreaker with “LIBRARY” on the back in CIA type font;
- several copies of a letter from our CEO ⁴ that reprimands employees who have broken the holy library rules and / or the clean desk policy;
- the master key to every room, cabinet and desk in the building;
- a portable shredder;
- a portable scanner (to scan interesting material I find);
- a grin on my face

As a librarian, my salary is not on par with other ‘professionals’ in the company, but this type of tasks gives me a lot of job satisfaction. It probably is comparable to the feeling HR managers get when they start a rightsizing or outsourcing project.

I start with my manager’s office and surprise, surprise there are printouts on his desk that are not in his workload basket. The workload basket is an invention from HR to make us all more efficient – all your correspondence should be in that basket, so you know where your work is. Unfortunately, the only hardcopy correspondence we get are memos from HR. The rest of the company and the world just bangs out e-mails with follow-up flags, CAPATALIZED subjects and marked with urgent to get things done.

The print outs contain lots of hand scribbled notes that unfortunately are not interesting enough to scan. I enjoy a moment of silence and then shred them, leaving a note from the CEO behind where the print outs where on the desk. The note reprimands the employee about how serious we are about information security and that the confiscated items can

4.CEO – Chief Executive Officer: the big boss, the ultimate manager where the buck stops, the one who takes the large bonuses.

be collected at the CEO's office. When I found out that nobody ever had the guts to try and collect the confiscated items, this job got a lot easier.

In the other rooms I find several overdue books and files hidden behind a cupboard or underneath annual reports. Why do they think they can hide books and files from me? I still regret that libraries decided to loan books hundreds of years ago. That is when all the turmoil started. We should have continued with chaining books to the stacks.

Back in my office I end the evening with recalling the e-books whilst sipping a latte. Aaaah, this is an area where IT makes my job easier. With the click of my mighty ALA ⁵ approved mouse I can see who has overdue e-books. Thanks to the wonderful features of PDF I can make the e-books useless as the font is changed to Wing-dings, every other sentence is backwards and the tune to Sesame Street plays over and over again until the book is checked in to the virtual library again.

It would have been easier to just recall the e-books and have a note shown to the user about this, but this makes it more fun.

5.ALA – American Library Association: the largest library association in the world with it's own secret handshake and honor system.

The one where trouble is announced

It is Wednesday afternoon, 3 p.m. in the library and the e-mail announces a memo from senior management by playing the Jaws theme. I like to have audio cues about what type of mail arrives in my mailbox: "The godfather" when my direct manager mails, "Oooops I did it again" when an e-mail has the word "password" and "lost" in it, "The A-team" when a library friend mails and the exorcist theme when the IT department is the sender.

The e-mail is full of bad news worded in management lingo. Fortunately I have many years experience in deciphering this cryptic language, where the word to content-ratio is about 50:1. It is the type of e-mail that on the surface has lots of nice looking buzzwords in a pleasant font, but the hidden meaning is quite the opposite.

"Dear employees of Hades Corp.," (stop your non-managerial, mundane tasks and listen up)

"In our relentless drive for top quartile performance we have launched a new cost effectiveness program which will at the same time enhance customer value." (The shareholders feel they don't get enough money - as we cannot cut our top management salaries or bonuses, you have to cough up money - and stop whining about this thing you call quality)

"To steer us in this exciting program, we have enlisted the value synergy team of McQuinsey Inc, who will bring us relevant insights into how we can

improve our business. Each team lead will work one-on-one with a McQuinsey consultant to come up with innovative, market driven cost-effective solutions whilst maintaining the 110% performance we owe our customers and ourselves." (Since we haven't got a clue how this business works, we have hired a bunch of overpaid and non-informed consultants who will come to keep you from your job - if they come up with something good, we implement it, otherwise we will just dismiss it - and by the way, you will have to do all of this besides your normal job.)

"You will be contacted by your McQuinsey consultant soon to discuss your cost-value balance and potential scenarios on improvement." (You will be confronted with lots of silly ideas to slash your budget, so it is up to you to prove they don't work.)

Oh great, just what I need. I haven't finished the new Harry Potter yet and now the bi-annual consultancy round starts to look for savings.

Luckily, I have been through this before, as these 'exciting programs' tend to come around every few years and in general the library in the end is not affected. My motto during these times is what I learned from my first mentor: "If you cannot beat them, confuse them".

The one where finance gets lost

It is 4pm in the library while I am grinding my teeth over yet another dispute with my arch nemesis in the finance department. Even though I have no problems with the CFO anymore, one of his minions is making my life hard.

A few weeks ago I needed to rush order a special publication to return the favor of a very senior manager. Rush orders are not included in the contract with our approved vendor, who by the way is off shored for "cost attractive" reasons (which is why every order takes 6x times as long and requires 12 forms). So I defied company policy and placed the order with a non-approved vendor who then sent an invoice.

I am sure my arch nemesis, the compliance assistant vice president minion, had a glorious day when he received that invoice. He left me a voicemail at 6.45am, knowing this would be the first thing I would hear in the morning - reminding me that this was not company policy and I needed to fill out a SCP (Step out of Company Policy) form to justify the expense.

Following the general finance policy of "keep them in the dark", he does not send me the actual form but a link to their website. The form is hidden somewhere, and I am sure he is grinning in his tiny cubicle, expecting me to call him in desperation as I cannot find the form.

But he has forgotten that there is only one master of findability here: me. As I also am the webmaster of the intranet, I quickly download the whole finance

department website to my local drive. I whip out my trusted tools collection on my USB stick and select a small, yet powerful indexer. This nifty tool rapidly indexes the whole finance website and linked documents, then shows it to me: categorized in Dewey, keywords in ranked order, a perfect balance between precision and recall and of course a KWIC ⁶ and KWOC index.

With one click of a button I fire off a power user query to drill down to the required form. This all without breaking a sweat.

But, the quest is not over yet. The form has been written in the ancient, cryptic language of finance speak which mere mortals cannot grasp

6.KWIC – KeyWord In Context and KWOC – KeyWord out of Context: very technical library terms. If you are a non-librarian, you don't want to know what they mean. No, really.

without surrendering their soul and first born to the higher powers of finance. The form contains sentences and words that sound like English:

"Care should be exercised to ensure that costs are not accidentally double-booked, due to both a service entry AND a cost accrual being created, and both posted to the same period." "Inter Entity Cutback Mapping" and "make NBV value zero and expect to have no depreciation posted if no UOP entered".

I am convinced the whole finance website and all their forms are generated automatically from a database with finance mumbo jumbo. No wonder they can report savings every year, as it gets harder every year to spend company money with their policies and forms. I have more chance of convincing a librarian that Google actually is better than his beloved library catalogue than to get this form filled out correctly.

Fortunately, all of the invoices are scanned and then stored on the records management system. Guess who is the records management corporate custodian - the job that everyone thought would be boring and not glamorous enough? And isn't it pure luck that the original paper invoice is stored in the archive, which just happens to be under my supervision.

I recall the scanned invoice from the system, use PhotoShop to change my name on the invoice to that of the CFO and *presto* a new paper invoice also appears. Guess that invoice will not be a problem, as the minion would never dare to bother the CFO with such a detail.

And all is well in the library again.

The one full of cuckoo

It is a bright Thursday afternoon in the library and I am humming the famous Warrior Librarian theme (“When your catalogue is a mess / when all your patrons are in stress / if your books are overdue / and you don’t know what to do / Warrior librarian will come to the rescue / with her mighty cataloguing skills / etc etc).

Following the announcement that McQuinsey consultants would “help” us be more cost effective, our management has been at a luxurious resort to strategically align the foundations for a synergy roadmap. Or something meaningless to that effect. From that two-day session, a “vision” has been developed (probably during the break on the last day, just before the final round of golf) to inspire the mere mortals on the work floor.

As I report into the IT organization, the vice president of Information, Communication and Collaboration has drawn up a vision for the library. It is now up to me and my “cost effectiveness coach” from McQuinsey to turn this vision into practical plans. Please note that those sessions will be held in the temporary meeting rooms in the basement of the almost obsolete facilities building on site. Which is undergoing a major renovation. Has no airco. No windows.

Below some inspiring excerpts from the vision for the library, which shall be renamed to the “Centre for Ubiquitous Content and Knowledge for Organizational Objectives” (CUCKOO for short).

“CUCKOO shall be recognized as a fundamental element supporting Hades’ mission-critical activities: As such, CUCKOO aspires to achieve deliver top quartile, KPI driven services, supported by highly responsive customer service.”

“We also recognize that all aspects of the organization will be influenced by CUCKOO as it will be interwoven across our organizational fabric.”

“At the heart of CUCKOO’s mission is the support for the economic development, which is substantially improved by a competitive workforce that effectively accesses and applies information to meet the challenges of a rapidly evolving world.”

Alrighty then. As Sue, my passive aggressive assistant would say: “...eh, what”? Which pretty much sums up my feelings as well.

Sue has been here since Hades Corp was formed many eons ago and cannot get excited about anything anymore. Being a low level employee, Sue has made herself irreplaceable by keeping secret files of every Hades manager since they joined us as young, energetic and excited cannon fodder. Her nickname is the untouchable. I have no clue what she does all day except for printing out web pages, as she is convinced the Internet will collapse soon. She will then whip out her offline version of the Internet, cross-referenced in her oversized Rolodex and charge us to use it.

I think I will bring Sue to the meeting with the McQuinsey consultant next week, as I am sure they will have lively discussions without making any progress.

The one where good advice turns bad

It is Friday morning and I am not in the library enjoying my morning tea whilst browsing library gossip forums. No, I am stuck in a meeting room with my manager and Bruce Tyler, the McQuinsey cost-effectiveness guru.

My manager obviously is smitten with Bruce's ability to spout management mumbo jumbo, which makes my b.s. radar go off within a few minutes.

Bruce smiles when he opens his laptop to start his presentation: "Well, let me start by saying how delighted I am to work with an esteemed team like this to bring cost effectiveness to the next level by combining radical new ideas with bleeding edge technology and "right sourced" for an optimal balance between shareholder ROI and customer focus". He didn't even blink an eye or breathe during that blurb, which makes me wonder whether he is a cyborg. And did I see my manager start to drool?

Bruce smiles at me like a cobra that is going to hypnotize a mouse, so I quickly mumble a prayer to Ranganathan (the saint for librarians).

"Your manager and I have had several inspiring conversations about the future of the department and came up with out of the box ideas for cost effectiveness. Based on my extensive experience in this area and your managers' insight, I am sure we have wonderful solutions to talk about. I'd like to present our ideas to you and then have your open and honest feedback. Getting a mutual buy in is essential to embed cost effectiveness in our hearts and minds."

"Our first idea was to abolish a central collection of books and journals and use the peer-to-peer model. So rather than having a central repository, items would be with a staff member who uses it and then is passed on when requested by someone else."

(Well, that would be a quick way to ruin a library collection, let the patients run the asylum).

"The following idea may sound too radical for you as a librarian – but let's keep an open mind and let try to visualize the potential of this: instead of subscribing to many different databases and journals, let's use the synergy of wisdom of crowds combined with the power of the social network. Hades employs many different unique individuals who all have a pool of knowledge and a wide network. This is a unique,

unrivalled, untapped potential which we can leverage to answer any question in our company”.

(Ok, let’s replace authoritative information sources with what a friend of a colleague says, based on a blog he read last week).

“And lastly, but surely one of my favorites which was brilliantly suggested by your manager – we all want all our information online, at our fingertips. So instead of a slow migration towards a complete e-library by acquiring licenses with different publishers – let’s make a big bang. Let’s ship the whole book collection of to our business partner in India where everything will be scanned and wiki’d.”

(Hey, we haven’t been sued for copyright violation yet – let’s make sure we will be the poster child for copyright violation!)”

Bruce smiles and looks at me as if I am a walking reduction target. But he surely hasn’t expected to deal with the force of the obnoxious librarian. “Bruce, before we go into detail of the different ideas – I was just wondering... how did your great advice help your previous customers like Enron and WorldCom? And would you care to explain to me how ethical it is that you are a major shareholder in the Indian business partner, which you recommend?”

Bruce’s phone starts ringing at the exact moment my boss turns to him with a bewildered look on his face. As the look on Bruce’s face turns from a smirk to sheer horror, he quickly leaves the room while talking loudly on the phone. My manager runs after him, so I guess the meeting is adjourned.

The one where a plan comes together

It is a gloomy Wednesday morning in the library and I am just about to recategorize all my desktop items in a more feng shui manner. Seems like putting the trash-can icon right next to the library catalog icon gives off bad vibes to all new catalog records. But before I can bring back harmony to my desktop and continue to enjoy my new Eva Cassidy CD, Sue (my passive aggressive assistant) hands me the phone: "The CEO's secretary for you".

Ah, that is the type of calls I always enjoy, as much as you can enjoy a verbal torture. The CEO's secretary is a woman who obviously has been instructed to keep the CEO as far removed from employees or decisions. Either that, or she just likes demeaning people.

Let me put it this way: I once needed to get the CEO's approval for a very large project proposal, so I wanted to make an appointment. The secretary asked me to explain it to her, and I hadn't uttered two sentences when she interrupted me: "and is there a point you are trying to make?" I quickly swallowed some rude remarks that came up, and I cut right to the chase about the decision I wanted to put to the CEO. She sighed deeply, looked at me wearily and said, "You people really can't make any decisions yourself, can you?"

So with that in mind I took the call:

"Hi, how can I help the CEO today?"

"Listen up: you have ruined the intranet. The new navigation confuses the CEO. So undo all the changes right away."

"Well, we just finished a three month intranet improvement, where we worked with focus groups to improve navigation, the search engine and the lay out. All the focus groups agree that the new improvements are helping to use the intranet better."

"Why wasn't I involved to represent the CEO's wishes?"

"You were invited several times but replied, and I quote 'I have no time for this type of details, shouldn't we outsource this anyway'"

"I don't recall that. And by the way, the CEO really does not like the use of an owl as the intranet mascot. He prefers to use a unicorn."

(Now she is getting on my nerves but luckily I have a flash of brilliantness)

"Mmmmm... the owl hasn't been the intranet mascot since February 2003. I am just checking the log files here, and it seems like that was the last time the CEO or you have accessed the intranet."

"Your systems are obviously full of mistakes, which doesn't surprise me, as you can also never find my documents. I insist you fix the intranet as we just discussed and demonstrate it to me later this afternoon "

Ok, now I have had it. The reason why we can't find her documents is because she refuses to put them in the document management system. She only stores documents on her local hard drive, never makes backups and then blames us when she has deleted an important document. But this is going too far, so with a grin on my face I start to work on my cunning plan.

[Later that day]

As colonel John "Hannibal" Smith once said: "I love it when a plan comes together". The CEO's secretary is delighted: the whole intranet is changed as she, sorry, the CEO would like to see it. I even changed the font and background color especially on her request. Little does she know that I have redirected her browser for the intranet to a locally stored set of web pages. Every link to another page will show an error: "the web server is being serviced, check back in 15 minutes". Her attention span is 5 minutes maximum, so most likely she will not be waiting for that.

And while I was at her computer, I changed the settings of her Microsoft Office to save directly to a workspace in the document management system.

Intermezzo: the librarian's worst nightmare restaurant

Last night a sales manager from a potential new vendor took me out for a dinner to discuss potential opportunities (i.e. another shot at a big year end bonus). He said he'd take me to a restaurant that would be perfect for me. He was so wrong.

The restaurant had books as the central theme, but for me it was like being in a nightmare. Books are my friends. Books have feelings. Books should be cherished.

Books should NOT BE USED as pillars between tables by driving a metal stake through a column of books from the ceiling to the floor.

Books should also NOT BE USED as a nice way to hide the restaurant bill in by cutting out a section of all pages of the book.

And the one thing in this restaurant that almost made me shriek out of frustration: I was facing a wall of the restaurant filled with bookshelves. ALL the books were in total random order. Fiction mixed with non-fiction. Different languages mixed. No classification whatsoever.

It took me a while to calm down when I was home that evening. I had to reread three chapters of "The history and origins of cataloguing" before the shudders were gone. You bet that vendor will be on the blacklist.

The one where a dead end becomes a break through

It is Monday afternoon, just after lunch and I am catching up on the latest library 2.0 jargon to mix with some new budget proposals. All of a sudden, my boss pops in with a big smile on his face: "Have I got news for you!"

My boss waves with a fancy letter in his hand and sits down: "Did you know J.M. Byron is about to retire and make a huge donation to the IT department?"

"J.M. Byron – he must be like what, 85?"

"He'll be 70 next month and now is planning to leave Hades Corporation, but he wants to leave a legacy."

J.M. Byron for many years topped my list of customers that I could live without. Since he had been around forever, he had opinions about everything. And since he was an engineer before becoming a board member, and engineers can do everything – running a library and records department is a trivial thing. He would look for every opportunity to corner me next to the coffee machine or the copier and give his 'advice' on how he would run a much better and efficient library.

My boss taps the letter in his hand: "Seems like he wants to donate quite a sum of money to your department, which comes in handy to remodel your library and of course the offices of the senior managers."

But you are the only senior manager in this department!

"Ah well, I have always had my eye on a nice big corner office, a big antique desk with green marble inlay and a signed picture of Bill Gates, right here."

My librarians' sixth sense is now picking up signals. Bad patrons never just go away. And they never go away and make life better for anyone... they use their farewell to take a final stab. And of course, I am right.

"However, J.M. Byron has one condition that must be met before he makes this donation. He seems to be a real book collector and wants us to take his collection of books, which is unique in the industry. You will be so pleased to have this in your library – here, look at the list."

I look over the list and gasp for air. The list contains every book my predecessors and I have weeded out of the collection for the past 25 years. Every time we weeded the collection, J.M. Byron would be fuming at us for daring to throw out a key book, which must be kept in the collection. Even if we argued that we already had multiple copies, the book

was a very old edition or very outdated, he would be upset and accuse us of not being true librarians. He would then take all the books and leave, making us happy that we'd gotten rid of them.

Now all these books would be coming back to the library and we would be required to keep them in a specially renovated "J.M. Byron" section for at least another 25 years. Luckily, my trained cataloguers eye scans all the tiny print with the conditions and finds something interesting.

"Aaah well, too bad you didn't read this correctly – he wants the books to be stored in the room where he started out originally. And if my memory serves me right, that is currently your office..."

So in the end we all win: I get a nice pot of money to redecorate the library, J.M. Byron's legacy is intact and my manager has his nice antique desk. Which is squeezed between four large bookcases, blocking his window and a part of his door.

The one were a point makes itself

It is Friday 4 PM in the library and I cannot seem to wipe the grin of my face. Is it because tonight the local movie channel is showing "The Librarian" and "The Librarian 2" back to back? No. Is it because David Sylvian's "The librarian" is on the radio? No. Let me explain the reason for my grin and good mood, even though it isn't payday or "hug your librarian" day yet.

I am obnoxious, usually to make my point or get even. Sometimes both. But once in a while the universe sees my point immediately and makes that clear. Today was one of those days...

Every year, my company Hades picks a global target that we all should focus on, besides our normal work of course. Lots of consultants get paid obscene lots of money to come up with workshops, interactive sessions, posters, slogans etc to brainwash all of the employees. Last year the target was relentless compliancy, and we all had to stand up during so called town hall meetings to pledge our commitment to the Hades Book of Compliancy.

This year the big target is 360 degrees safety (they must have a special guy to come up with the names for the targets). Seems like our shareholders are worried that our safety statistics are not "top quartile" in the industry. I once asked during a departmental meeting with a vice president what will happen because everyone in the industry wants to be top quartile, so it seems like a never-ending race. The VP told me that was a very interesting questions and he'd get back to me on that with more information. I am still waiting. Luckily I am not holding my breath.

So in order to make us all fully aware of what we need to do to become the best of the best with regards to safety, all our managers have to brief their team on the same day. It just happens that on that day, our manager was in another office overseas. So he decided to kill two birds with one stone and host the safety briefing virtually via our new desktop based videoconference tool. We all have a web cam on our screens, which most of us cover up with a plastic coffee cup. You never know if there is a feature where your manager can turn on the web cam without you knowing.

At the given time, we all tuned in to our managers' safety briefing via the video conferencing software. The nice thing is that the software also includes a chat facility, which can be used to chat with the presenter... or

with others on the session without the presenter aware. You can guess the latter is used the most during management presentations.

Halfway during the safety briefing, just before I almost doze off after being seriously bored with endless slightly out of focus PowerPoint slides and the monotonous voice of our manager, I hear sirens. But they are not in our building. I hear sirens through my headset – the sirens are in the other office where my manager is. I remembered that one of the very first slides stated very clear that safety must take priority, especially when in doubt. So I fully expected my manager to close the session, apologize and evacuate the building.

But he didn't. He looked around, mumbled something about it probably being a test and carried on with his slide set. In the background it was clearly visible that other employees were evacuating...

The one where a meeting is crashed

It is Thursday morning, 11.02 AM and I am bored in the library. I have already randomly switched signs on the shelves (people like to search for information online, so why not offline), put up the excuse of the day (solar flares) why the library catalogue is offline and changed the interface language of the intranet to Portuguese (it is after all Dia da Liberdade). But still I am not my usual obnoxious, happy self.

I pick up the phone and call my buddy in meeting services. Just like me, he is undervalued and underpaid. He is a certified facilitator, but spends most of his time explaining to senior managers how to hook up their laptop to the projector. So we both know that job satisfaction will have to come from ourselves. One of our favorite ways to lighten our mood is to crash a meeting: drop into a meeting unannounced and try to create a maximum of confusion without being recognized.

A prerequisite is that nobody in the meeting knows you, so we quickly scan the list of meetings for today. As our office is also a regional headquarter, there are lots of visitors from other offices who meet here. And we're in luck, today is the first meeting of a cross country group of tax and legal consultants who will spend all day talking about "Shared Service Centers: Off-Shoring or Outsourcing?" Fascinating. That meeting just begs to be crashed.

Especially for these occasions I keep a sharp business suit in the library, hidden behind the cupboard full of bound library journals. I put on a pair of hip designer glasses and practice my management mumbo-jumbo: "We will dramatically increase our exclusive strong commitment to integrated systems design. A key driver in this process is web 2.0 that will enable the collateral application frameworks" and "We will inevitably take the lead in outsourcing, only to speed ahead of the pack in the world-class field of the economically sound corporations. Virtual input gives rise to the first class team players, on a going-forward basis."

Key to a successful meeting crash is to be totally self-assured and radiate power. So I wait until the meeting has just started and then walk into the meeting room. The presenter stops, and shoots me an angry glare. The rest of the attendees look up and I wink at them: "Sorry, the jet was late. What can I say? Please continue." I pull up a chair and squeeze the seat as close to the presenter as possible. I open my briefcase, pull out a laptop and put that on my lap.

With a sigh, the presenter continues his slide set. I have already upset him with my entrance, so now it is up to me to build up my game. And what better makes a statement than a ringing mobile phone? My buddy in meeting services is just outside the meeting room and calls me just as the presenter has finished one sentence. The mobile phone in my suitcase is on top volume with the Macarena. I feign surprise, open the suitcase and turn off the phone. "Sorry guys, I forgot to turn it off".(Again: Can't get these extra lines to go away...)The atmosphere in the room now gets tense, so we're on the right track. Now I open the laptop and start typing whilst the presenter recaps what he tried to say already twice. I sigh deeply, look up from my laptop and start looking around. I whisper, just a little too loud, to my neighbor: "hey buddy, is there a power outlet here somewhere? I need some juice." My neighbor wants to get rid of me and points to the power outlet behind his seat in the wall. So I slowly open the squeaky briefcase, get the power cord out and squeeze myself behind my neighbor's chair. He now has to move his chair forward, suppress his anger but still show an interest in the presentation.

Everyone in the room now really is distracted. Time for my grand finale. I wait until the presenter clicks to the slide with the agenda for today and then snap my fingers at the presenter. He grinds his teeth and asks: "Do you have a question?"

I get up from my seat, lean over the table and point my finger at him: "Well, I represent the entire north-east region for cross-business work streams and I just came back from a meeting with our CEO. He made it very clear that the new work stream alignment leadership board should be consulted about restructuring plans! Your meeting undermines that corporate decision and I am baffled by your blatant attempt to waste corporate resources!"

I look around as if I am Bruce Banner who is about to turn into the Hulk. I yank out the power cord, shove the laptop and the power cord in my suitcase and stride towards the door. At the door, I turn around and say: "If I were you guys, I'd reconsider this whole project and come up with a darn good explanation how you will align this with our global work stream targets. I expect a memo by tomorrow!" With that, I slam the door shut and leave.

Within five minutes I have changed back into my normal clothes and pop over to my buddy's office. "Man, you were great", he says, "the look on their faces when you slammed the door... !" And then the best part begins: watch what happens next in the meeting room. Since every

meeting room is equipped with the latest in videoconferencing, there are a couple of cameras in the room. So with a bag of Doritos and a few cans of Pepsi we have a wonderful afternoon.

The one were doom is spelled

It is Monday morning in the library and too early for trouble. Yet, I have the unmistakable feeling that something bad is about to happen. I switch on Pandora, the streaming music website and the first song it plays is Elvis Presley's "Trouble".

Hmmm.

I open the mail and pick up a new book that has to be catalogued: "The 13 mistakes of highly ineffective people".

Hmmm.

I quickly touch my Nancy Pearl ⁷ action figure to prevent further signs of trouble. But it is too late. On my desk is a post-it note from my manager: "please come to my office ASAP to discuss great opportunity for career boost". That comes down to: "I want to delegate a task which is either very unpopular or too complex for me, so I'm giving it to you. If you achieve the goal, I take the credit, if you fail – you're the scapegoat".

After an hour I come back from the meeting with my manager and all the signs were right. I have been put in charge of project "Document Object Oriented Management" (DOOM). A recent IT user survey has pointed out that end users can't find the documents they need. Of course I could tell everyone why:

Users don't know what they are looking for;

If they think they know, they are looking in the wrong places;

If they are looking in the right place, they use a maximum of two words;

They can't be bothered to read the help or work through the 5-minute tutorial;

But hey, the IT managers will not take simple explanations as an answer. They will take any excuse to build another system. Which is just the opposite of what the users want. But then, IT managers are not there for the end users of course.

To cut a long story short, in a recent meeting with all the IT head honchos project DOOM was initiated which should put an end to users not finding documents. I have been tasked to organize a workshop with the key stakeholders to align vision, outline a road map with milestones

7. For non-librarians: Nancy Pearl is a famous librarian, who has her own action figure. Really.

and define clear deliverables linked to business priorities. In short: it has as much chance of succeeding as a snowball in hell.

But then, I can at least have some fun with the workshop... So I invite the following key stakeholders to pitch against each other:

The search maestro: convinced that all users need is a concept-based search engine, and metadata is completely useless and outdated;

The records management evangelist: everything is a business record and therefore should be declared as a record, requiring 37 metadata fields, cross referenced with endless master data lists;

The document workflow preacher: metadata is useful, but should be stored in the document and search engines will be redundant when people just follow the workflow;

My passive aggressive assistant Sue, representing the library: computers are evil. Everything should be stored on paper in duplicate and indexed in her rolodex using the 1978 edition of the indexing bible.

All the participants think everyone else is wrong and they are deaf for other viewpoints. But they have more in common: they will repeat their ideology until they see blue in the face and need a whiteboard with a marker to make their point.

And I have put only one whiteboard and one marker in the meeting room. Let the games begin!

The one where profit is at a loss

It is Monday afternoon, 3.35 PM in the library and I am just about to take a nap behind the reference works section in the library when I get an e-mail from my boss:

“I want you to attend this seminar about how to turn libraries into profit centers – a great opportunity to create a real paradigm shift! I expect a proposal with best practices related to our high level strategy with quality-assured guesstimates.”

(Sigh) So the good news is I get to spend a day and a half at a nice hotel on company expense. But I have to come up with a proposal that looks real enough, yet will not encourage my boss to really believe that libraries can be profit centers. A library is a shrine and treasure of wisdom, a sanctuary of stillness and the center of tranquility. Not a profit center.

I close the door of the library, put on the 'closed' sign (“library closed for upgrading to ISBN-13”) and hammer away at my keyboard.

FROM BOOKS TO DOLLARS – THE HADES LIBRARY AS PROFIT CENTER

Based on best practices gathered at the seminar, which I benchmarked with industry peers, I have come up with the following ideas to have the library perform at an economic optimum.

1. Use contextual advertising on the corporate intranet;
2. Sell confidential company reports on eBay;
3. Put advertising on all scanned company records;
4. Sell copies of our telephone directory to headhunters and competitors;
5. Rip out the last page of every book and when asked for, sell them;
6. Also, remove the conclusion of every electronic article ordered and charge for it;
7. Charge \$1 per minute when calling the library.

Good, I got that done. Now I am off to the seminar where I can skip all the presentations and workshops. This leaves me more time to catch up on listening to audio novels, check out the hotel pool bar and in general “network”.

The one with a cunning plan

It is Tuesday afternoon 4 PM in the library and I have unplugged the phones and shut the door. I am in love. Head over heels. For the past three days I cannot think straight, every waking moment is spent dreaming and longing. But it is an impossible love.

The object of my affection is the iDop Feel, the new multimedia-life-style device that has been launched earlier last week after months of speculation about features, colors, name and price. The iDop is everything I want and more. It has a 5 mega pixel camera (ideal to create hi-res photos for blackmailing), Wifi and an internet browser (so I can check out Flickr's stupid library signs stream during lunch), an MP3 player (so I can listen to "Tales of a librarian" by Tori Amos and the audio book of Melvil Dewey's life), a video player (so I can watch bootlegs of the Australian comedy "The Librarians"), a lightweight yet powerful instant messenger (so I can gossip with other library bloggers), the most advanced photo browsing software (which on the fly removes wrinkles, grey hairs and goofy smiles), gigabytes of storage space and (drum roll) a near-perfect e-book reader. Gasp. With this device, I'd never have to talk to another human being or get bored!

But alas, Perfection also has a price tag. In the case of the iDop Feel, that price is way over my budget. But I want one. I need one. I must have one. It would be my precious!

If only I could persuade my boss to buy me one. Hmmmm. Now, that's an idea.

So to quote Baldrick from Blackadder: "I've got a plan so cunning you could put a tail on it and call it a weasel."

I start off by calling one of the managers in the Knowledge & Learning Department. That department is the brainchild of one of the vice presidents and is fighting for power with IT, which I report up to. Both departments claim to own "knowledge management", or to be more precise: the obscene budget for knowledge management, a concept so vague you can fund many projects with dizzy acronyms and non-measurable outcomes. A bit like marketing.

Anyway, I entice him to play a pawn in my new game:

"Hi there, did you get the memo about the enhanced knowledge facilitation paradigm shift program the IT VP started? I think you guys should be included in this... ."

"Woah there, what's that?"

"Well, I just got this memo about how IT will 'shape the company's tacit knowledge retention curve by clustering organization wide wisdom sharing sources on a single device... "

"Could you send me a copy of that memo? Because I am sure the Knowledge Officer would be interested in that".

And of course I am more than happy to share a copy of that fabricated memo by sharing the link in our document management system. The next step is to make a copy of that memo, but attribute it to the Knowledge & Learning Department. Then I am on the phone to the assistant of the IT VP:

"Hi there, I was just wondering why IT wasn't mentioned in the memo about the enhanced knowledge facilitation paradigm shift program from the Knowledge & Learning Department?"

"Woah, hang on there - what memo?"

"Well, I just got this memo about how the Knowledge & Learning department will 'shape the company's tacit knowledge retention curve by clustering organization wide wisdom sharing sources on a single device... "

"That's not their job - IT is responsible for knowledge devices! Send me a copy of that memo and I'll escalate this".

Since I am the all-powerful admin of our document management system, I can see the flurry of forwarding and comments about the memo in the system. It looks like both IT and Knowledge & Learning want to own this project by claiming they are way ahead of the other.

So I innocently pop over to my manager's office, who looks desperate: "Those fuzzy wuzzy knowledge maestros fooled us again. I have just heard the Board wants to fund their proposal for a feasibility study regarding a new portable knowledge device... "

"Well, what if we did not only have a proposal for a feasibility study... but an actual working prototype... with all of the organization's knowledge in audio, video and text integrated in a touch display, wirelessly linked to our infrastructure and loaded with the virtual library?"

"Librarian, are you for real? I don't have months and ten thousands of dollars to beat the knowledge department!"

"Well, actually I could put this together for a mere 900 dollars and three undisturbed days in an offsite secret facility. I promise you can

demonstrate it next Monday at the interdepartmental project proposal meeting."

That explains why I am now in a five star hotel, all expenses paid and lying on a king size bed with my iDop Feel. This morning I loaded it with a random selection of business records, a complete backup of the intranet, all the recorded speeches by the IT VP, our collection of e-books and a local copy of the Wikipedia. So I now have 2.5 days left on company paid time to start this romance...

The one with a mess up

It's Monday, a little after lunch and my creativity is working overtime. This morning my manager told me he had a big, important assignment for me that would look good on my resume. Well, it turned out that an industry IT event was taking place and the chief IT manager was invited to speak about our company's web 2.0 strategy. Since the chief IT was occupied on that day (a golf clinic has priority of course), the assignment was delegated to the senior IT strategy manager. Who delegated it because it wasn't prestigious enough. And so, after several levels of delegation I was asked to present about "web version 2, portals, content mess ups and other interesting stuff to show how fab we are in Hades". And then they trusted me to put together a presentation, which would not need approval as long as I did not reveal secrets.

Ah well. I put everything on hold for this important assignment. I shut the door of the library (sign on the door with "library closed for MARC⁸ records audit"). I then gave everyone all permissions on the document management system, so no one would bother me to request permission for folders and documents. I redirected all my e-mail, phone and instant messaging to my passive aggressive assistant Sue, who will reply to everything very friendly like: "that is your problem", "that is not of your concern" and "did you check Google?"

So after several cappuccinos, the entire Bill Joel box set and a bag of M&M's, here's my outline for the presentation titled "Portal to Hades: the future of business driven strategic information and service architecture synergies":

1. Hades will speed up performance reviews by automatically creating profiles of the employee's performance. In one report, the supervisor can see

- The amount of e-mail sent and received, split per topic and automatically classified as personal or business;
- Candid photos of the employee's behavior at office parties;
- A summary of their Internet search history;
- And a breakdown of their Internet download activity;

8.MARC – a data format to exchange data between library systems.

2. Work-life balance is a core value for Hades. We want our employees to focus on their personal development, linked to Hades business priorities. Finding a partner is a very time-consuming and stressful activity, which we would like to facilitate. All 145,842 employees of Hades are already listed in the corporate directory. This directory will be expanded with information on salary, benefits, hobbies, pictures and relationship status (single, married, married but looking etc).

With a few clicks of a mouse, our employees can find a match within the company and save valuable time and energy. This also supports our goal of cross-business and cross-region relationship building.

3. All information tools will be migrated to clunky web versions, with far less functionality and less stability. However, they will be given web 2.0 names (Grmbl, Yikes, OhYeaH for example) and end users will be able to put them in widgets on their desktop. To complete the web 2.0 vibe, the widgets will be in forever beta and not supported by central IT.

The one with the old librarian

It is Tuesday afternoon, 3.45 PM in the library and I am preparing myself for my weekly “surplus library and archive equipment inventory”. Which is less boring than it sounds... I’ll let you in on a secret.

I was hired several years ago for the corporate library position at Hades Corporation because the librarian at the time was close to retirement. He had been in that position for 40 years and basically built the library, book-by-book, budget dollar for budget dollar. Nobody really knew how the library worked as the librarian was quite secretive about it.

So when I was hired to take over, one of the main tasks assigned to me was to find out how everything worked, since no process was documented and the librarian kept every file locked in his desk. The library catalog was only accessible on his computer, so everyone had to call him to get information. But he didn't mind that people called him, it helped him know what was going on in the company, he said. And he was always there, never a day off (“I don't have a wife, and I like my job”) or a day ill (“books keep you healthy”).

Within the first week I realized that the cloud of mystery around the library served the librarian well. Nobody really bothered him, since no one really knew what he was supposed to do except handling search requests and making sure the books and journals were available)

The librarian had cleverly worked out a dual reporting structure, reporting both to IT and facility services. This worked in his advantage, as every time one department wanted something changed, the librarian claimed that the other department did not agree. Since the IT manager and the facility services manager were not on speaking terms, they never agreed to meet in order to align their needs for library services.

Since he never asked for large investments, never raised issues or even showed the slightest hint of wanting to change, the librarian became something of a stealth persona – flying under the radar of any management attention or reorganization.

I was, of course, very young and full of ideas. Seeing how old fashioned the library at Hades was, my head was full of innovations and I submitted memo after memo to management with challenges and future visions. The old librarian politely smiled every time he read one of my memos and slowly shook his head: “let me tell you, in all of my 40 years

I have never bothered management and therefore they never bothered me."

After a few weeks we built a relationship of trust, as he knew he was leaving and I would take over. Every day he would tell me more about how things worked, or why not. He started to bring me to every meeting and introduce me as his successor, except for one. Every week on Tuesday afternoon at 4 PM, he would excuse himself and tell me he was going to make an inventory of surplus archive and library materials for donation to the third world. I did not understand how he could do this every week and I still had not seen a single box ready for shipment to developing nations.

When I asked him about this appointment, he smiled in his little grey beard, his eyes twinkled behind his glasses and he told me: "I will tell you once the time is ready".

On his very last day, I was very curious to learn about this weekly inventory. He took me down to the basement, where the paper archive was kept. He opened the doors of the archive and walked along the shelves of files and archive boxes. At the end of the section "tax receipts 1990-1999" he stopped. I noticed that behind that cupboard was a small door, almost the same color as the wall. The sign on the door said: "surplus archive and library materials". With a small key, he opened the door and let me in... .

It was a very small room, cleverly hidden at the end of the archive. The room was just big enough to contain a leather chair, a small table with a record player, a small wine rack and a bookcase filled with classics in leather bound volumes. The old librarian smiled at me: "This is where I have been doing my inventory for over 30 years, the one reason that kept me sane in this organization and why I never became ill. Consider this the gift of a secret from an old librarian to a young librarian, use it as you see fit."

So in honor of old librarians, I have continued the old tradition. Every week I go down to the basement, lock the door, play some old jazz and toast to old librarians who never shall die...

The one with half a library

It is Wednesday afternoon, 2.24 PM in the library and I am playing Pink Floyd's "Money" in a loop. This morning all service departments were gathered in a town hall session with our managers for a "Ban out unnecessary costs" session. Yes, it was as bad as it sounds.

First we got an overview of how much money was spent on luxuries like furniture, coffee, cleaning and catering. In Hades' constant drive to make even more money for our poor shareholders, the focus is not on selling better products or delivering better services to customers – it seems the key is in eliminating all costs. So a relentless cost cutting effort (I think it is the 6th in little over 2 years) has been launched. In the past we had to submit endless spreadsheets with all the costs and then spend many hours explaining why something was done, why it was done this way and how we already did it in the most cost efficient way (of course previous cost cutting exercises were never evaluated).

Well, actually I just created one spreadsheet with made up numbers and used that in all the projects, as every time the team composition changed anyway. And since I am the only one with access to the library back-end systems for all the numbers, it is hard to contradict me.

But this time I need to come up with something new: the assignment is to document how much we can deliver for half our budget. Then management will decide whether we can get by with half of the services or half the level of service. Perhaps half is good enough....

Of course I am fully willing to participate in any effort to help my organization cut costs. As long as it does not interfere with the library. This crazy cost-cutting idea must be killed before someone really thinks this has any future. So instead of documenting what half the library budget will deliver, I will actually start doing it. Happy to be a shining example for the rest of the organization by taking end-to-end responsibility for a true cost saving effort. I'll bet this project will be killed before we get to lunch tomorrow.

As of tomorrow I give you "half the library":

- The intranet will only be available every other minute;
- Every other page in newly scanned reports will be blank;
- We serve staff with names starting with A-K on Monday and Wednesday. Staff with names starting L-Z will be served on Tuesday and Thursday. On Friday we will serve staff at random (as we please);

- Links to reports and articles may or may not work depending on a daily flip of a coin;
- The automatic library door will only open for every other person on half the speed. Occasionally it may also just open halfway;
- Requests for books with an even ISBN ⁹ number will be served in even weeks; odd ISBN numbers will be served in the odd weeks;
- You have a chance of 1 in 2 to get through to the library by phone or e-mail;
- For every literature search request, only even or odd literature references will be delivered.

Money, its a crime
Share it fairly but don't take a slice of my pie
Money, so they say
Is the root of all evil today

(Pink Floyd, "Money"(c) 1973)

9.ISBN – International Standard Book Number. Every published book in the world gets an ISBN so it can be identified.

The one with creative copyright management

It is Tuesday morning, 11.26 AM in the library and I feel good about being a good, law abiding citizen, a rule obeying Hades employee and overall an obnoxious librarian.

Yesterday I was called into a meeting with my manager and the business opportunity consultant (I'd prefer to call him the b.s. consultant) to discuss our portfolio of electronic journals and databases. Or to be more precise: can we do more with even less money?

That seems to be the business equivalent of the philosopher's stone: how to turn inexpensive items into gold. Or at least something shiny.

I explained how we are already saving money by using economies of scale. We have centralized on several publisher e-journal packages, which in the past were many smaller licenses. This has lead to better discounts, one point of negotiation and only one invoice to manage (and monopolistic publishers only have us over a barrel once). But I should have known that it is never enough to save money until your budget is zero and I start doing my job as a volunteer (of course working for Hades is a constant cycle of joy, happiness and life enriching experiences, so why pay me?).

Well, luckily the opportunity consultant was a real expert on the topic of electronic journals and he was full of ideas:

"Using out-of-the-box thinking, industry best practices and our consultancy firm's proprietary knowledge base, I have several great opportunities for Hades Corp. in this exciting area. Each of these opportunities is a perfect balance between value enhancement and cost saving, and of course I get paid for every stupid idea I can sell to you guys."

Well, actually he did not say that last part. But I saw him thinking it.

I will summarize for you the wonderful opportunities presented to me in all PowerPoint glory, with the aim to reduce our spending on the e-journal portfolio:

1. Cancel all e-journal subscriptions and move completely to document delivery. All document delivery will be outsourced to a cost advantageous country. All requests will require a signed off business case by a senior manager.

(The "Let's make it impossible" scenario)

2. Cancel all e-journal subscriptions and use the wonderful treasures of freely available information on the web.

(The “Let’s dumb down research” scenario)

3. Cancel all e-journal subscriptions and take up paper subscriptions again, this time delivering them to a Hades office in a cost advantageous country which does not acknowledge copyright. Then we can scan all journals there and store them in the corporate document management system.

(The “Copyright? What copyright?” scenario)

When opportunity 3 was presented I stood up and applauded, as I recognize a legal disaster when I see one. I thought about pretending to wipe a tear from my eye, but I was afraid that would be pushing it. With a lump in my throat I asked the consultant to send me the PowerPoint presentation of this opportunity set so I could follow up on this paradigm shifting insight.

And I did follow up. By forwarding it to the legal department of Hades. So that is why my manager and the business opportunity consultant are in a mandatory disciplinary 4 hour meeting with the corporate lawyers from HQ and I scored a brownie point with the lawyers. Lesson learned: you should always keep the lawyers on your side, even if it means sacrificing someone else.

The one where we invent money to spend money

It is Wednesday afternoon, 4.15 PM in the library and I am doing my Zen exercises as preparation for a meeting with the Software, Hardware and Infrastructure Technology International board (usually nicknamed shitty). After months of requirements gathering, market scans, stakeholder mapping, stakeholder management, stakeholder engagement, stakeholder consensus shoot-outs, requirements mapping, architecture design, architecture redesign, architecture landscape design, interface mapping, forward and backward compatibility testing, benchmarking and the usual coffee, late nights and teeth grinding I am now ready to ask final approval for the upgrade of our library and records management systems.

I pick up my binders with all the supporting documentation and head down to the conference room. The secretary of the board is outside and warns me that I am the next one on the schedule. The board consists of wise men and women who have been selected to veto about whether or not to authorize spending of IT related budget. The main requirement for being selected on the board is not having any practical knowledge or expertise about IT. Actually, I even think that most of the board members not even use a computer, as they have one or more secretaries for menial work. They are busy hopping from meeting room to meeting room defending their pet projects, squashing other's pet projects, inventing new buzz words and "thinking out of the box".

The door opens and the previous applicant for IT budget spending comes out, covered in sweat and a bewildered look in his eyes. The secretary shoves me in while quickly whispering: "They are running late, so keep it short and speak only when spoken to." I wanted to ask whether it was safe to look the board members straight in the eye, but she had already closed the door behind me.

I sit down and face the jury.

"So, well, well, what have we here... a software upgrade for library and records management software" begins the head of finance, who acts as the chairman this time. "I did not know we needed a library, as we can find, store and file everything ourselves, I thought... but okay, I see all the boxes have been ticked for this request. So let's get this over with. Does anybody have any objections?"

The rest of the board now starts reading the proposal, as none of them have read the required pre-reading materials (that would influence their ability for out of the box thinking).

I am crossing my fingers and hope I will get permission, as I'd like to get out of this meeting before 5 so I can get back to my desk to update my blog. But then the senior auditor says "hmmm". I do not like "hmmm", as usually it is followed by trouble [insert 'Jaws' theme here].

The senior auditor taps his finger on the proposal: "Hmmm, this seems to be software that can be used across the Hades corporation in every country. Chairman, if you remember, we specifically introduced a requirement that proposals for software that is to be used globally, at least 50% of the budget funding should come from a different region of our corporation to demonstrate global buy in."

NO!

I'd like to jump over the conference table and pummel him with my first edition of the Dewey biography, but instead I sigh and address the senior auditor: "Of course I have read all the rules, but as you know there is only one library in Hades– so there can be no other regional funding from a different library."

"Well, dear librarian, that is not my problem. A rule is a rule in my book. As an auditor I am nothing if not a stickler for rules. When we start making exceptions (he actually shudders when he utters that foul word) that will be the end of our corporate governance of which I am so proud. It is the foundation and future of this company."

The chairman makes a note and tells me that either I come up with 50% of the funding from a different region of the Hades group of companies, or otherwise my proposal will not be approved.

Mmmm. This calls for an improvisation paradigm. I lock the door of the library, put a sign on the door "closed for quarterly Z39.50¹⁰ architecture quality control" and put on my headphones. As always, the serene sounds of Spinal Tap's classic album "Break like wind" bring me into the right theta state. Brain wave builds upon brain wave as I suddenly find the right eureka moment.

I pick up the phone and quickly dial the number of my buddy Melvin in Kuala Lumpur. He manages the farm of servers that run all of Hades' critical applications. His real ambition is to build the world's largest

10.Z39.50 – a very technical term to indicate how clever librarians were to invent data exchange formats before the rest of the world thought of doing this.

collection of Manga comics, so I have used my powerful library network to get him obscure Manga comics. In return, he hosts the library and records management system on one of the mega servers, guaranteeing me perfect service and total up time.

`Library dude, long time no speak – how's life?’

“Melvin, my friend, I need a favor, a suit is blocking my plan to upgrade my systems. I need 25 grand from you.”

“Wow, hey, you know you are on my special list, but I don't have spare budget I can give you.”

“Well, Melvin – I know that. Corporate politics is just a game, so let's just play a little game of Monopoly to beat the suits at their game of tic-tac-toe. I have a budget of 50.000 dollars for this software upgrade, but I need 25.000 of that to come from a different region. You have never invoiced me for hosting my library and records management software, right?”

“No, of course not, you're a pal and your systems don't consume any CPU power or bandwidth worth charging you.”

“That is very nice of you, but don't you think that after all these years an invoice for your service is overdue? An invoice of say, 25.000 dollars? I will pay you for that long outstanding invoice and then you can fund half of my systems upgrade.”

“Librarian – you've got them checkmate!”

And we go back to our normal scheduled plan of world domination...

The one with a special price for a special customer

It is Friday morning, 11.25 PM in the library and I reminisce about my job. Sometimes people will ask me: what is it that drives you in your job? What makes you wake up every morning and immediately feel empowered, energized and challenged to go to your desk for another day at the grind?

And my answer is always: the library customers. For them I constantly update policies to make life more difficult, make systems more complex, install yet another layer of bureaucracy and in general make them work for me.

Customers– they provide me with so much entertainment, like little busy ants in ant farm. Once in a while you shake their world and enjoy seeing them scramble around. No, if it were not for the library customers I would seriously consider moving to a job in finance as they have customer disengagement down to an art.

Just the other day, a customer called me while I was just in the middle of reading the wanted ads in “Library cataloguing monthly”. I looked at the phone display and noticed it was one of the new hires, who just started this month. It is very important to manage their expectations as otherwise they keep bugging me:

“Library”

“Hi, this is James from account development. I would like to request access to the confidential reports collection.”

“James, did you fill out the form on our intranet?”

“Well, ehm, I could not find it...”

“It is very easy. Go to the front page. Click global services. Select your business area. Enter your location code. Click the little small, blinking, moving dot in the bottom left hand corner of the screen, just below the edge of your browser window.”

“Oh, ok, but I need access today as I need to analyze a bunch of reports for a meeting tomorrow.”

“James, first of all you did not use the magic word “please”. Secondly, the service level agreement clearly stipulates that every request for access to the confidential reports will be handled within 3 working days. That is, if you filled out the form correctly, otherwise it will be ignored without warning.”

“But.. but...”

"But James, I understand your situation. You're young. You're new. You need to deliver to crawl up the corporate ladder. So you need a better service than the normal service – you want the Very Important Customer service with dedicated expert librarian support and guaranteed turn around time."

"YES!"

" Ok James, now we are talking. Let me see what the special price would be for you... mmmm.... Skip the form and handle the request by phone, that would be 2 extra large boxes of Oreos. Skip required permission procedure, that's either washing my car or cleaning my windows at home. Immediate authorization of your access: a yet to be defined favor which I can request at(?) any time in the future."

The secret to life is making it work for you.

The one with a room with a view

It is Monday morning, 10.15 PM in the library and the mailroom just delivered the package I have been eagerly waiting for. Finally, the extended edition, director's cut DVD box of "The Librarian" in high definition and with surround sound has arrived. Now I can see the adventures in their full glory as they were meant to be. However, neither at home nor at the office do I have the equipment to enjoy this cinematic spectacle in all its beauty. Mmmm.

The library does have a small multimedia room that was used to show training videos - yes, real videocassettes with magnetic tape. I now use these as amusement for the new hires library tour. I make them guess how long the magnetic tape is in one cassette and then we measure it by pulling the tape across the hallways. As my first library teacher always said: "show, don't tell".

I now mostly use the multimedia room to store my collection of autographed famous librarian photos. My most prized possession is an autographed picture of Nancy Pearl, with a thoughtful motto on it as well: "Shush first, ask later". This year I am hoping to expand my collection by getting an autographed picture of Stephen Abram at the annual Special Library Association conference. I would also really like to have one from Meredith Farkas, but I am too shy to ask her.

I walk over to my manager's office and walk in while I roll my eyes and sigh deeply. He pretends not to notice me and feverishly keeps typing. I look over his shoulder and say: "Hey, if you are using your calculator, you can only use numbers - no full sentences." My boss turns around annoyed and waves me to his small conference table. He wants me out of here as quickly as possible as I just caught him chatting with the new secretary in HR, but he quickly alt-tabbed to Microsoft Calculator when I looked over his shoulder.

"So, make it quick - I have a strategic alliance group meeting in ten minutes."

"Well, you know our multimedia room is completely out of date and unused? The Knowledge management & learning group thinks that is such a shame and now want to set up their own state of the art multimedia room next to their offices."

"What? No way. We in IT own multimedia, they should stick to their wishy washy story telling and playing around in Second Life. Sheesh."

"For 9k we could completely refurbish the room and then use it to offer a multimedia, cross-platform, fully interactive learning experience - heck, I'll even volunteer to take the lead and set up a program of regular sessions. I am sure that our board would be impressed when IT takes the lead to enhance skills and offer social networking."

"Mmmm, are you sure you can do it for 9k? If it's below 10k, I can put that on the training budget which comes from the learning group – so indirectly they pay for it and we get the credit."

Of course I did my homework regarding the costs. I already contacted my buddy in meeting services. He made a good deal with the plasma TV vendor who is eager to get his foot in the door with a multinational like Hades. So for a steal we will get two 52" plasma high-definition TV's, a professional state of the art projector, a multimedia centre, a surround sound set and two social interactive experience facilitation computers (read: an XboX360 and a Nintendo Wii).

So pretty soon the library will open the new multimedia room with an exciting line up of sessions:

Monday: developing leadership skills and overcoming obstacles

(Illustrated by the showing the complete "Lord of the Rings" trilogy)

Tuesday: the future of information technology and virtual worlds

(Illustrated by the showing of the "Matrix" trilogy)

Wednesday: developments in leading edge computer graphics

(Illustrated by playing the latest video games)

Thursday: information management: protecting the assets

(Illustrated by the showing of "The librarian" and "The librarian II")

Friday: the power of improvisation to survive in a changing world

(Illustrated by showing a series of Roadrunner cartoons)

The one where I blow off steam

It is Tuesday afternoon in the library and I am catching up on library gossip on twitter whilst listening to the polka version of Van Halen greatest hits.

Suddenly my l-user (library user) radar goes off. Sheesh. There is a real flesh and blood customer at the library counter. So you build them a virtual library with online databases, web 2.0 interfaces, step-by-step wizards for every information request possible and they come to the library. What is it with these people? Don't they realize I need peace and solitude for my world domination plans?

So first I try to ignore him by staring at my computer screen. But it's not my day, the customer still is there and shuffles his feet. I pretend my phone vibrates and act having a dull conversation that could go on a long time. But the customer does not flinch and now starts to scrape his throat and looks at me with growing impatience.

Well, we better get this over with then. I put down the phone and walk over to the counter.

"Hey – next time feel free to send us an e-mail – my time is precious, but since you are here now... "

"Well, I just wanted to loan this book, so could you do that for me please."

"Hmmm. Why?"

"Why I want to loan this book? I need it for my project."

"How do you know whether this is the right book? Did you check all the available books in the world against a set of weighed criteria and now you are SURE this book is THE book with the right information?"

"Well, no, but judging from the title and the back cover, this seems relevant for my project."

"Excuse me mister hot shot – if we all just went around loaning books just because it SEEMS relevant based on the title and the back cover, I may as well loan out ALL books instead of keeping them safe & sound here in the library"

"But you're a librarian – you should loan out books... "

"And that is where you are wrong – I personally hand picked this whole collection of books over the years, carefully catalogued them

according to the highest standards, lovingly placed them on the right shelf right next to their book peers, I dust them with tender care every week and make sure the room is exactly the right temperature and humidity. When I loan out a book, you touch it without gloves, make marks in the book, leave it unattended and you crack the spine!

And let me just check the system – you already have two books on loan. Why do you need a third book? Will you just come in every day and look what might happen to be relevant? I will not put up with care-less loaning, mister!”

(At that time I wish I could create some foam around my mouth for extra effect)“Ok, I am sorry, I didn't know you felt so strongly about this. I'll put the book back on the shelf.”

“Heck no. A non-schooled librarian is never ever allowed to put a book back. Very likely you would put the book in the wrong place, messing up the whole shelf, the library and subsequently the library universe. But what else can I do for you?”

“Ehm. Nothing. I just wanted to loan this book.”

“No extra requests like a complex literature search or professional advice on how to structure a wiki?”

“No, not really... ”

“So let me get this straight. You come down to the library *just* to borrow a book? Do you know I have a masters degree in library and information science? I graduated with honors from a top library school and received praise for my thesis 'Investigation of machine performance by information dimension: Types, frequency, and sequencing of errors made during human-machine interaction'. I have created the world's foremost online corporate library presence, combining state of the art taxonomies with breath taking visual search interfaces, built on top of a world class selection of online information sources, including never before seen parts of the deep web and previously unknown gems from our own legacy information, long thought lost for mankind. And all of that within budget and on time, defying the laws of the universe. AND YOU WANT ME TO LOAN YOU A BOOK?”

And another customer leaves the library, feeling empowered now to use the self-service.

The one where we define the reorganization rules

It is Monday morning, 9 AM in the library and I am happy to see that the bit torrent files over the weekend have come in with the complete series of the Australian TV show "The librarians". I have a dedicated data communications linkup to the Internet for regular back ups of the vital records to our offsite storage provider, so I had to stop that. You have got to have priorities in life.

Just when I walk down the corridor to the nearest coffee machine (or well, a machine that produces a brown, lukewarm liquid almost, but not quite like coffee) a poster catches my eye: "Don't forget - we're leaping ahead to be #1 in the industry!". Oh yeah. I almost forgot, the bi-annual reorganization will start this week - just what I need.

Like in most other organizations, a reorganization is not so much aimed to improve the organization as it is a ritual, a rite of passage for Hades Corporation. Everybody knows it is a regular experience and it is an important event in our office lives that would be boring without them. Everybody knows his role and we reflect back on previous reorganizations, with moving stories about those who did not survive the '97 Quest for Performance. Staff measures each other's credibility on the number of reorganizations they have survived.

Like any important ritual, a reorganization has rules, which must be adhered to:

1. Every reorganization shall reverse the previous reorganization

What is decentralized, must be centralized - or vice versa. If we are organized by industries, we will be organized by regions - or vice versa. The more daring organizations organize into multidimensional organizations, defeating anyone to understand whom they report to;

2. Management will provide only vague updates

A reorganization will always start with rumors - a best practice is for management to fuel contradicting rumors. After that management will create a communications plan with the intent to use as much words possible without saying anything at all. Perfect examples would be:

"Considerable progress has been made in engaging key stakeholders on different levels. A proposed roadmap has been developed outlining the way forward. Interface concerns are currently being evaluated and addressed in subcommittees."

"Management is excited by the enthusiasm of all staff to embrace this change. Several constructive challenges have been brought to the table which will be evaluated."

Always stress that questions are welcome, but never ever answer them in the required detail;

3. Never evaluate the previous reorganization

Whatever promises were made about increases in profit, cost savings or life altering goals - thou shalt never evaluate the previous reorganization. That was done by a previous manager in the past and therefore can be ignored. It is wise to ignore any lessons learned from that reorganization as obviously times have changed so dramatically that they do not apply for this reorganization;

4. Task force

Management will set up a task force to do the actual work of the reorganization. Not only does this leave more time for lunch, golf and back-room meetings, it also creates a clear group which can take the blame. The best task force has a number of external consultants, which can be fired easily if the situation requires a clear statement to the organization;

5. Freeze

During the reorganization preparation, the transition and "settling in period", there should be a complete freeze on budgets, filling vacancies, new projects and any important decisions. Not only does this save money, it also helps the employees focus on how on earth they will do their jobs instead of worrying about whether they will still have a job in the future;

6. Deny downsizing

The only important thing employees worry about is their job. Management should not spoil the surprise too early in the reorganization but keep everyone on his or her toes. Always deny downsizing, but feel free to discuss that rightsizing and right sourcing are under evaluation;

7. The right person for the right job

A best practice in many industries is to reduce all positions in any skill pool or team by one and then have all staff apply for the available jobs. A bit like musical chairs. This clearly motivates the employees to apply for the job they have been doing for years and stimulates a healthy competition based on skills, experience and guts.

The one were we come to the rescue

It is a quiet Wednesday morning in the library and I am re-arranging all the links on the intranet in alphabetical order whilst tapping my feet in tune with a Led Zep bootleg. All of a sudden the top-secret librarian-in-need phone rings.

The general audience is not aware that all librarians worldwide are part of a secret underground organization that connects all librarians across continents, ages and different types of libraries. The cover is brilliant: library associations. Nobody suspects library associations, as outsiders already roll their eyes from boredom when they hear the word. Not to mention the websites and conferences library associations use to mislead non-librarians from what is really going on.

Do non-librarians really think we go to conferences to discuss "Involving senior citizens into public library reading programs: talk loud and slow", "Libraries: pillars of our communities" or "Library 2.0: hip and wild Dewey style"?

The library associations and their conferences are all part of the worldwide community of librarians discussing the plans for world domination and how to survive the battle with he-who-shall-not-be-mentioned (starts with a G and rhymes with Oogle). Using secret handshakes, covert operations and coded messages (cleverly hidden codes in 'book shelving schemes' and so-called 'MARC records'), librarians live in the public eye but are never under suspicion.

"This is Dr. Venom speaking. What is the top secret pass-phrase for this week?"

"Dr. Venom, this is Larry Laffer. The seagulls are flying low over the green grass."

"Larry, that is a 10-4. What is the emergency?"

"Our brother Big Al is in trouble. His corporate library is under attack by the evil consultants from McQuinsey. Unless he can prove his value within 48 hours, he will be on the street. I have raised the emergency level to 2 and will initiate immediate retaliation. I request your full participation in this war. Can I count on you? "

"We're all blood brothers, Big Al and I both swore our oath to Saint Dewey on the Library of Congress Rule Interpretations, first edition in LIS 101. Consider this emergency to be taken care of."

I put down the phone, shut down the intranet and redirect all library mail to the central spam-reporting mailbox. I don't need distractions now.

Quickly I pull out my little black book of contacts from behind the dusty old set of English - Esperanto dictionaries. With a few phone calls I put my plan in action. To summarize our covert operation:

- Big Al's library peers in his industry will put together a fancy industry report with fancy 3D pie charts and many tables proving Big Al is providing the maximum bang for the buck in the industry;

- The proposal from McQuinsey is totally ripped apart by the library association, questioning every statement, statistic, page number and font size using an overload of counter arguments, citation of documented best practices and statements from library peers;

- The library association will announce Big Al as the librarian of the year and his organization a 'visionary organization in the industry, scaling content and meta data architecture to shift paradigms';

- Big Al's manager will be getting phone calls from big publisher "account managers" complaining that Big Al is a ruthless negotiator, squeezing every penny from their deal, leaving them speechless;

- Every library user in Big Al's organization will be contacted to discuss their involvement. Key users will all send their praise to Big Al and his manager, thanking him for the impeccable service: the right information before they even knew they needed it. And in one case Big Al was able to retrieve a valuable document, thought long lost, that helped the R&D department settle a patent dispute;

- The McQuinsey consultant team will be spammed by our Polish, Russian and Danish library avengers with their daily, high volume e-mail discussion lists about Z39.50, proposed ISBD rule updates and cataloguing best practices.

- Accidents can happen when 20 volume reference works fall off the top shelves on unsuspecting consultants or finding Latin insults written with waterproof markers on their cars.

That should do the trick... if not, we have more tricks up our sleeve of course.

The one where we offer remote assistance

It is Friday morning, nearly 11 and I am humming along to some good old Marillion tunes while I am driving a user in a remote location slowly insane with a chat session. For some reason some users don't seem to understand on how to use the basic search, and then bother me by clicking on the "ask a librarian". I mean, don't they have any self-esteem - not understanding the BASIC search? Why bother me with your lack of self-confidence?

In order to discourage users from bothering me with "ask a librarian" (or better said: to stimulate end user self service) I put in a three-stage challenge-response system where the system shows words in distorted images that the users have to decipher and fill out in a box. To make it more of a challenge, the entry box is programmed to stay one inch from the mouse cursor. That stimulates the hand-eye coordination of users.

But once in a while a user passes the test and a chat window pops up on my computer. It is key to give the user the idea that they are getting help, but are better off sorting things out themselves in the future.

So I type very slowly and answer like ELIZA, the well-known computer program that simulates to be a psychoanalyst.

"I have a problem with finding information."

"How are you today? What would you like to discuss?"

"Fine, thanks - I can't seem to find the internal standards for setting up DPERs."

"I see"

"Well, can you help me?"

"Please tell me more about your problem."

"Like I said, I can't find the standards for DPERs."

"That sounds interesting. Tell me more about DPERs."

"You know DPERs, don't you? Those are our company standards."

"Why do you worry about company standards?"

"I don't worry about them!! I want to find them!!"

"What would it mean to you if you find the DPERs?"

"I need to finish my project asap!"

"That is quite interesting. Tell me more."

"I don't have TIME to tell you about my project. I need the DPERS FAST!!"

"You seem agitated. Why is that?"

"You are not helping me! Can you help me find the standards or not??"

"Why do you think I am not helping you?"

"You don't answer my questions. For one last time: where are the DPERS??!!"

"You seem obsessed with DPERS. I will transfer this chat session to the company psychologist for further discussion."

And off they go. It sometimes breaks my heart to see how hard working colleagues buckle under the pressure. But of course I am always there to steer them towards professional help.

The one where we use smoke and mirrors

It is Tuesday afternoon in the library around 4 PM and I'm listening to some old Steely Dan albums whilst messing up the new expense claim system. In the past I would get a monthly budget for document delivery based on the average of the past year's data. This saved me from a lot of hassle, which of course goes against the grain of our detail-obsessed, spreadsheet-hugging, bureaucratic finance staff. So they figured out that if they cannot force me to take a salary cut, they can at least lower my job satisfaction.

So now every tiny expense has to be filed separately in the expense claim system. This system was built by a software engineer who hates people and life in general. It defies any Windows menu logic, has no help screens and uses different icons for the same purpose. So on one page you have to click a green block to confirm, on another screen you should use the little disc icon or a green flag. Well, it keeps you concentrated.

The one thing that drives me absolutely nuts is that the expense claim system does not give any feedback. When you click on a menu item, there is not hourglass indicating you have to wait. No, the screen freezes and you don't know what is happening. So you click again. Wrong. Now you have to wait twice as long.

I have demonstrated that it takes me twice as long to use the system compared to the actual work of ordering a document. But I am obliged to use the system. Which means war. So I have developed a script that splits all my invoices into 10-cent claims and then feeds them into the expense management system automatically. So right now I'm feeding the system an average of 155 invoices per minute. Funny - the expense management system goes down after 5 minutes.

Just when I lean back in my chair to enjoy the satisfaction of a job well done, my boss knocks on my door.

"Well, ehm, could I perhaps ask for a favor?"

I sigh.

"Remember I had to demonstrate the records management system to the top leadership team six months ago?"

"Yes, you told me they all loved it and assigned you a bonus."

"Well, I may have overstated the features of the system slightly."

"Like how?"

"The Chief Diversity Officer was critical about the ease of use and said he would only use it if he could have his records filed automatically by e-mailing them to the system. I know that is not possible, but I may have given the impression that it would be possible in 6 months... ."

I fold my arms and smirk: "then you've got a problem."

"Yes, yes, I know, because the top leadership is meeting again next Friday and in the meeting notes I have an action to demonstrate this feature. So... perhaps you could mock it up?"

"Let me get this straight. Six months ago you took all the credit for MY work, plus you made a promise that you cannot keep. Then you waited almost six months before dropping it in my lap?"

"That is a wrong way of looking at this. I would like to see this as an opportunity to work out a mock up of how perhaps one day this feature might work... "

"So, you want to me to create a fake feature, so you can pretend that it works as a beta but needs some work... . and then hope they forget about it before the next meeting?"

"Can you do that?"

"I could. But that would mean re-prioritizing all my other work, and I really need to reshef all the reference works and alphabetize the links on our intranet. But you may of course try to influence my priorities... ."

"Ok, ok, I must convince the top managers - name your price, as long as it is somehow business related so I can approve it!"

It took me a few days of screen capturing, Photoshopping, smoke and mirrors to create project "fake duck" - hey, it talks like a duck, walks like a duck and quacks like a duck, so it must be a duck. On screen it looks like an e-mail is automatically screened for security classification, keywords and retention period. Then in a cloud of magic glitter, the record is correctly filed into the system.

So now my boss can save his face and put up a great dog and pony show, while I can enjoy my unlimited subscription to the audio book site - so if you'll excuse me, I have 117 hours of nonstop Harry Potter to listen to.

The one where we help to select an application

It is Monday morning, 9.05am in the library and I am doing some ego surfing on the web whilst head banging to the muzak version of Metallica. Just the perfect way to start the week, were it not for the meeting at 10am.

The powers that be have decided that Hades Corp should form a strategic vision for information management using long term horizon scanning and out-of-the-box scenario thinking. This roughly translates into a frenzy amongst mid-level managers who sees this as an opportunity to get attention from senior management by pretending to have a clue where we should be heading without a lot of real work involved. This as opposed to the general management motto of "we will deal with the issues on a forward going basis". If this were not enough waste of time, they now have asked vendor X to which we sold our soul by standardizing on most of their overpriced, bug-riddled and bloated software to share their views on what Hades Corp should look for in information management.

Well, let me guess... whatever we should look for is exactly what vendor X has on their development schedule. Vendor X has Hades Corp almost completely in their claws, except for the records management and library system. Oh, they tried to sell us their "solutions". Not that they have anything that even resembles a library system. Or a records management system that I would wish upon my worst enemy. But hey, their sales staff schmoozed the top IT managers, the right gold cuff links were offered and Hollywood award winning PowerPoint presentations did the trick. I had to do a proof of concept with their software and compare it to our current not-so-state-of-the-art-but-working-just-fine-thank-you applications.

So I checked their specifications with our user requirements, which miserably failed. Their products could do the basics but did a lot we don't need.

Management told me that specs aren't always what they seem and users never know what they want, so let's do a pilot to really get a final verdict - vendor X is paying for all the costs. So they flew in their top consultants and their best engineers to pull this off.

They had a week to create an acceptable pilot setup with competing goals: I wanted to prove my point that we should stick to what we have;

vendor X desperately wanted to prove their applications were the best thing since sliced bread.

All week I wore the polo shirt with the logo from our current vendor and I provided the vendor X staff with a copy of the current setup. Of course I made it a bit more challenging by corrupting certain indexing and "forgetting" about certain system passwords. Unfortunately I was in off site meetings every afternoon where my cell phone did not work. But hey, life should not be too easy for the ambitious vendors...

On Friday afternoon they proudly showed their setup to a group of managers. Since our Hades managers have no clue what our library and records management systems do, they were simply amazed by all the shiny buttons, creative use of fonts and stylish logos. They admitted not to have a 100% match with all the user requirements, but management stated that our end users would certainly be willing to give us certain key requirements in exchange for nice shiny buttons and customizable font type (which is of course a very critical feature).

After the presentation, all eyes were on me for the final verdict. Would I give the thumbs up or down?

"Mmmmm... your presentation is... . interesting."

"Thank you, we look forward to working closely with you to set up an extended proof of concept."

"But... there is just one small thing that is very essential and a must have requirement... are your applications compatible with hardware to print punch cards?"

"No, of course not - you must be joking! We noticed you put that in the requirements, but we realized that this is a joke!"

"Well, as you should know - Hades Corporation has a very important government contract with the republic of Elbonia. And as records management experts, you will surely know that Elbonia requires all their business records to be delivered in punch cards.

We must be compliant with these government rules, so I am afraid I cannot vote for your systems."

"But... but... "

"Sorry, I wish I could continue our discussion, but my phone just vibrated and I must leave now to check on our MARC Z39.50 filter."

The one where we become a status symbol

It is Friday evening, 10 PM and I am back in the library where I haven't been for a week. I have put "Mess of blues" of the late Jeff Healey on the sound system and walk around the library, happy to be back between the books, bound journals and humming servers. It has been a roller coaster week... .

Exactly a week ago I was ready to leave for a long weekend when the phone rang. The extension that showed up was "CEO office", which seemed strange to me. Being at the bottom end of the food chain, I was rarely called by the powers that be in the plush offices. Curiously, I picked up the phone.

"Yeah, library here - make it quick - I need to be home on time to watch the documentary about the unknown, yet crucial role of the Dewey classification in the underground secret information sharing during WWII."

"Mr. Librarian. This is Gil R. Moralius speaking, I am chairing the committee to select a new CEO for Hades Corp, as you may know."

"Gil, that's great - you are considering me for the job, I assume?"

"No, Mr. Librarian. Unfortunately that is not the case. I am however calling you regarding a promotion which I am sure you would be interested in. I just looked at your career so far in Hades Corp, and found out that in all your years with our exciting company you have always worked in the same role, in the

same low level job group."

"Well, Gil, this "exciting" company really does not have a career path for librarians - but of course I am more motivated by challenging projects, stimulating intellectual peer groups and the utter fulfillment of working for Hades."

"Then you are the right person for the new job that just opened today, which will offer a unique career perspective in a challenging top level environment where you will constantly encounter paradigm shifts. You will be the strategic information enabler, facilitating top executive knowledge interchanges."

"Ok, Gil, let's cut the crap - what is this all about?"

"Mr. Librarian, we have identified the ideal candidate for the future of Hades. In utmost confidence I am revealing to you that we are about to appoint Prof. Dr. Joyce Fedizko MBA BWG III Jr as our new CEO. As

you will know, Mrs. Fedizko is one of the world's leading CEOs who has single-handedly revolutionized the coffee sweetener, paper clip and stuffed animal industry. We are convinced she will bring Hades Corp back into the top quartile market position. However, she is a tough negotiator. We have already tripled her current salary, offered her a custom designed Lamborghini and exclusive use of the company Learjet. Yet, she wants more. She wants to become the world's most exclusive CEO and is now asking for the next CEO status symbol: a personal librarian."

"Huh?"

"Yes, apparently Mrs. Fedizko was bragging about our offer to her CEO peers earlier this week on the golf course. Bill Gates was not impressed, as he revealed to her that he has a personal librarian. She now considers this the prime fringe benefit. So we looked in our files, and as you are the only librarian in Hades, we would like you to become the CPL - Chief Personal Librarian."

Of course, there was a catch. I would assume the new position immediately, but the talent enabling department (formerly know as HR) could not for some reason put me in a higher pay grade. That would however be solved with the right number of forms, signatures and secret handshakes.

So on Monday morning I started my new career as CPL. After my acceptance, Mrs. Fedizko had accepted Hades' offer and sent her instructions to the interior design department. They worked all weekend with my guidance to remodel two existing meeting rooms on the top floor into a smaller copy of the old British Library circa 1904. So think antique book shelves, leather chairs, golden railings and copies of Da Vinci drawings.

I was given an obscene book budget to acquire first editions, rare and signed editions of books. Also, Mrs. Fedizko had her personal collection shipped to me, existing of signed biographies from every important head of state, business hot shot and celebrity she ever met.

It was like a dream come true, this superb collection and only ONE potential customer. Who would travel all over the world and hardly be around to disturb the tranquil silence in the library.

The other great part about the job description was being present during selected strategic meetings, feeding Mrs. Fedizko with vital information. I would sit next to her in the top level suite with my laptop.

Whenever someone else started talking, I would quickly pull up relevant information via the information sources available at my fingertips. With a distinguished thumbs down I could indicate to Mrs. Fedizko that her opponent was lying, or I could whisper strategic information in her ear when she was contemplating an answer.

Yes, it was a great week. Unfortunately Mrs. Fedizko quit already on Thursday. Apparently the company Learjet had been painted in the wrong shade of pink, her Lamborghini's ashtrays were full and her personal aura reader convinced her that Hades Corp board members had a horrible influence on her chakras.

But I am happy to be back where I belong. And since most of the CEO book budget was already spent, that superb collection is now all for me to enjoy...

The one where we team up with the lawyer

It is nearly 4 PM in the library on a cloudy Tuesday and the legendary "Journey - Live in Houston 1981" concert in the superb 5.1 surround sound mix is blasting through the library. Yeah, "Who's crying now"... or should I say "Keep on runnin'" regarding the situation that I had to deal with earlier today...

It all started last week when the phone rang, with "private number" in the caller id display. Which in itself is not a good sign. Sometimes it is a user who wants to stay anonymous. Usually they will call because they want something that they should be perfectly capable of achieving themselves. And if they cannot achieve it themselves, they should not want it in the first place. Some may say I am not user focused, I say I am managing demand.

And if it's not a user whining about something or the other, it is someone from outside our company who distracts me from my mission to dominate the world. So I picked up the phone and immediately disconnected the call. Usually that gives a clear signal to the calling party that yes, I am here, but no, I don't want to talk to you. But the phone rang again within 30 seconds. Geez. Now I've completely lost my train of thought of my movie script to turn my unauthorized biography of Melvil Dewey into a miniseries ("The Melvil Dewey story - the drama, the suspense and the classification scheme").

"Yeah. Library here. Waddaya want?"

"Is this the Hades Corporate Library?"

"Perhaps. Who are you?"

"My name is Randy Goodrem, vice senior sales account executive for Business Executive World News. I assume you are familiar with our valuable, world famous, must-have industry news source?"

"I think I did a trial a while ago... but then you guys send me a proposal that was completely insane. So no, we're still not interested. Bye."

"Hang on, that is not the reason why I am calling. I wanted to ask you where to send the invoice for the trial."

"Excuse me - the invoice for the trial? You guys told me it was a free two week trial!"

"Aah, well. The trial is indeed free up to 15 downloads. After that we charge you, which is clearly stated in our terms of use at the bottom of

the front page in the tiny, almost grey font on the white background. Just below the huge blinking banner. It's only visible on your first visit, but basically by using the site you acknowledge to our terms and conditions."

"You're kidding me!"

"No sir, either you pay us \$15.000 for the trial or you sign up for an annual, global subscription in which case we deduct that amount from your subscription fee."

"Randy, listen - you don't think I even WANT to do business with you guys now?"

"Well, I must say that most of your peers immediately saw the win-win situation and have now signed up to our platinum corporate subscription. So I assume you are at least as clever as them. Otherwise I see no other way than to sue you."

(smoke coming out of my ears)

"Sue me? I'm gonna sue you! Do you know who you are dealing with???"

"Take it easy, mister librarian. Let me come over to your offices next week to come to an agreement. I am sure we can work out a deal where you sign a lousy contract, which results in a huge bonus for me and you then have access to our superb, must-have industry news website."

So we arranged for a meeting in our offices. Mr. Randy Goodrem clearly did not know that nobody messes with the obnoxious librarian. Because the obnoxious librarian plays golf with the ferocious lawyer. Peter Burkman Jr. III is one of the top lawyers at Hades, defending us in all the unjustified lawsuits. Burkman Jr. III (I can call him "the Burkmeister") then flies with the corporate jet to the other side of the world to defend our company and then counter sue the poor bastards. We quickly found out that my power over information and his legal master brain made a great combination. Many times I have been able to supply him with some smoking gun documents to win a case, so I can now ask for a favor.

I call the Burkmeister on his cell phone and find out he is currently defending us in a 2 gazillion lawsuit in Australia. When I explain my case to him he laughs out loud: "Oh great, this is gonna be fun... some sales schmuck trying to rip us off and not knowing whom he is dealing with. I

will get my secretary to reschedule my calendar and I'll bring this sales weasel to his knees."

So this morning the Burkmeister was sitting in our fanciest meeting room, with his back to the window. Opposite of him we put the most uncomfortable chair we could find for Mr. Goodrem, which was at the lowest level possible. So Mr. Goodrem would not only have to squint his eyes against the sun behind the Burkmeister, but he would also have to look up to him.

When Mr. Goodrem arrived, we let him wait for 40 minutes at reception while we were swapping lawyer jokes. I then went to pick up Mr. Goodrem and brought him to the meeting room. The Burkmeister was talking on the phone and did not acknowledge us. Mr. Goodrem walked up to him and held out his hand - ready to shake the Burkmeister's hand. But he waved dismissively to Mr. Goodrem and continued his phone call. After 5 minutes, the Burkmeister put down his phone and looked Mr. Goodrem straight in the eye with a sigh:

"Well. I had expected a more worthy opponent. But ok - you're here. I am a very busy man and I need to be out of here in 10 minutes. I understand you are wrongly accusing our corporate librarian. Why?"

"As clearly stated on our website... "

"Clearly? Clearly? Mister Goodrem, you and I both know that unless the user confirms that he agrees to your conditions, your outrageous claim has no ground. You have no case. You have nothing."

"But our terms of use... "

"Your terms of use are a pile of drivel and the only thing that is clear to me is that your company is trying to scam innocent, hardworking librarians into signing licenses. Are we done now?"

"But.. but... if you don't pay, we will have to sue you!"

"HA! Do you know how many lawsuits I have handled for Hades Corporation in the past year? 150. And how many did I win? 300. Because in every case I counter-sued and won that case as well. Mr. Goodrem, let me put this straight - you will apologize to my dear colleague the librarian here and then I will count to 10. I don't want to ever see you again and neither do I want to hear from your company ever again. Otherwise I will bury you in lawsuits and my librarian here will rally his library gang to disrupt every public event of your company. And believe me, you don't want to have a group of rowdy librarians turning against you."

And just to have something to cheer me up later, I videotaped the whole meeting. Would it be too obnoxious to upload a copy to YouTube and then submit the link to a few library blogs?

The one where we thrive on organizational complexity

It is almost 2.15 PM in the library and I am checking my e-mail while enjoying the fabulous live album of the lovely Dana Fuchs. My specially designed "management fluff" spam filter has already deleted the growing amount of e-mails from all kinds of managers, who all of a sudden feel like they should communicate more with staff.

The CEO started this trend and after that every management layer wanted to chip in their views, notes, letters and drivel. I especially hate the e-mails from management, which are intended to start a change. It's almost like management thinks: "well, instead of doing all this expensive change management, why don't I just send out an inspirational e-mail telling people that they should change. They will immediately see my point and become 'change agents'". To be clear - I don't have a problem with management as long as they don't interfere with my work.

Now one e-mail has fooled the filter, a message urging all of us to "decomplexify" our way of working. Is that even a word?

Mmmm, a nice e-mail from my library protégé asking for advice about how to deal with organizational complexity. Well, I have always loved organizational complexity - it offers so many advantages. Let me explain.

Instead of reporting to one boss, I have a departmental manager to whom I report hierarchically but I get my steer from a committee consisting of representatives of all the major library user groups. Establishing this committee was one of the best ideas I ever had. Since the committee spans business divisions, regions and time zones - most of the committee members don't know each other or even talk to each other.

Whenever a difficult problem comes up that I can really do without, I sent it to the committee. Usually they meet via teleconference once a month with me as chair, but most of the times not enough committee members attend to make the decision valid as agreed by the committee decision-making rules (wonder who wrote those rules?). That then gives me the excuse that I am "on top of the issue", but unfortunately the committee hasn't decided yet. Shift the blame, baby.

It is always good to pit my departmental manager against the committee: "Well boss, that indeed is a great idea - but I need the full buy in from the library steering committee of course." Can you spell d-e-l-a-y?

Just as a precaution, I have also developed a great relationship with the chief operating officer (COO). It all started out when I started feeding him the internal gossip spreading across the company via instant messaging. As a legal precaution, all chat sessions are recorded and stored in my lovely records management system. And guess what - I get to do random checks on records to see whether they meet the required retention classification. In the rare case the library steering committee almost reaches a decision which clearly is the wrong one, for example "why don't we reduce the budget" or "we need more granular usage statistics" I sigh and remark that the COO had a completely opposing opinion when I spoke to him yesterday at the golf club. That's usually enough to nip a problem in the bud.

If needed I can also use the smoke screen of different project managers. I always try to be on different projects for different parts of the organization. It is always great fun to spark a discussion between the library steering committee, my departmental manager and a project manager via e-mail. I just like to send them all an e-mail once in a while like "I will take my annual summer leave next month, what are the priorities I should wrap up before then?" Then it's nice to sit back with a cup of relaxing tea and watch the flurry of e-mails fly by...

Last but not least, I always ask for road maps, vision documents and agreed deliverables before even considering a decision above the level of "what font type should I use on the library meeting minutes template?" Managers love that type of questions and huddle in plush meeting rooms for a while, leaving me alone to get stuff done. Once they come back, I throw in the word that will scare them into making any kind of major decision: I ask for funding.

The one where we streamline the holiday library

It is 2 PM in the small public library of Holidayville (name changed to protect the innocent) and I am silently humming Van Halen's "Top of the world" while wearing my "Solo librarians rock!" t-shirt. I never like taking holidays, as I never know what happens in my library when I am not there. Heaven forbid a non-library certified bozo puts a monograph in the serials section or classifies a confidential document with public access. But according to Hades' corporate policy, I have to take my vacation days.

So I have taken my precautions before going on holiday. My passive aggressive assistant Sue guards the physical library. Her favorite word is "no" and she hates lending out things or doing l-users (library users) favors. Last year Sue took a course in customer service from the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) University, the same fine university that teaches the security agents on airports how to be customer focused. Sue especially enjoyed the courses "Humor - why it should be avoided at all times", "How to stare down customers" and "Showing your commitment by stamping forms aggressively".

So the physical library should be safe. I have also revoked every one's permissions on both the intranet and the records management system. Sure, things will pile up in my absence, but I am not taking my chances by having stuff submitted or changed unsupervised. We all know these l-users will go completely nuts without proper librarian supervision. My manager asked me: how will we handle problems that arise in your absence? Well, I am of the conviction that most problems will go away when ignored long enough. So during my holiday, I told my boss to either ignore the problem or ask people to submit a complaint form via the intranet (which will go straight to bit-heaven). If problems are still around when I get back, I will take over and ignore them.

As hardcore librarian, I cannot imagine a life without books, information or shushing people. Therefore I have chosen my holiday very carefully. I was lucky to find a very small holiday resort that offers peace, nature and yes, a public library run by a solo librarian. I made a deal with the librarian there that I will fill in while she goes on a "monographs and serials claiming master class" cruise in the Caribbean.

The public library is small, cozy and offers many services for the different groups in Holidayville. On my first day, the library was closed so I had time to review all the collections, services and policy documents. It

was clear to me that this library needed to be run more like a bureaucratic, complex and power hungry organization in order to compete in today's economy. Luckily I have experience in that area.

So I started by putting up inspirational posters around the library. Some of my favorites are "Blame - the secret to success is knowing who to blame for your failures", "Apathy - if we don't take care of the customer, maybe they will stop bugging us" and "Respect - let's agree to respect each others views, no matter how wrong or stupid yours may be".

I also reviewed the services and cut over half of them that did not score as stars or cash cows on the Boston Consultancy Group Matrix.

Then I started to rewrite the remaining services, starting with the children's story hour, which had potential to be just more than me reading a story to the kids. I clearly believe children are our future, so they should learn at an early age that life is not about fun & playing, it's about targets, skills and using your elbows.

So as of now, the story hour will start by a clear overview of the learning objectives of the story hour that are clearly linked to the mission statement of the library. Every selected story will start with a motivational video about the topic, after which I will go around the group asking everyone to make a pledge to contribute towards the story hour's objectives. After the story has been told, the group of kids will be split into focus groups, each with clear deliverables to submit after an hour. The deliverables will be linked to the size of ice cream as a bonus.

At the end of the day, the story hour will be evaluated by performing an after action review, which enables me to update the story hour best practice database.

(The story hour improvement ideas was inspired by a story during Dave Snowden's presentation at the SLA 2008 conference)

The one where we tackle the customer satisfaction myth

It is Friday afternoon, 2 PM in the library. The “All Elvis, All the time” Internet radio channel is playing and I am wearing my Elvis ‘68 comeback special suit. Yes, I have a different interpretation of the Hades’ casual dress code... but I rock in this outfit!

Earlier this month my boss went on a management retreat with other mid level managers. As usual, every time he goes away to meet with other managers, he comes back all energized and wants to start all kinds of initiatives. I have learned how to deal with them – give my boss what he wants, but with the minimum amount of work involved and get something out of it for the library.

So this week we had the following conversation:

How do we measure customer satisfaction now?

Well, we have the library steering committee. We invite them once a year to the VIP meeting room, offer them the best lunch available, smuggle in some beers, overload them with free candy, and show them the available blackmail information we have on each of them. Then usually they give us very high ratings.

Besides that we have made up raving testimonials from senior managers. We pick random names and titles from exotic locations, and this organization is so large and dynamic that nobody knows these managers don’t exist.

But do we ask our real end users how they value our services?

Of course not. Why would we? In general they are a bunch of whiny, spoiled and pushy bunch. Either they don’t know what they want or they want something they shouldn’t want.

And they wouldn’t recognize a high quality library service if it smacked them on the head, bit in their ears and danced the Macarena on their desks. I have won several awards for my flawless implementation of the ISBD (International Standard Bibliographic Description) rules in our catalogue – but do you think someone even notices this?

Can you explain to me how we handle complaints?

Well, Sue has been appointed our designated complaint handler. So far she has been able to convince all complaining customers that in the end it was their own problem to begin with. Since she was appointed in

this role, we haven't had a lot of complaints. So we must be doing really well.

When was the last time we did a user satisfaction survey?

That was several years ago as the main feedback was "stop bugging us with your endless surveys, we're trying to work here!"

But those answers were not enough. A manager isn't happy until a new system, process or project has been started. So I suggested the following to him:

"We will measure customer satisfaction by the results of customer satisfaction scorecards (CSS, as nothing exists in Hades if it doesn't have an acronym). After every service provided, the CSS will prompt the requester with a short, web based pop up window asking for feedback on the quality and value of the service. Filling out the form is mandatory. All results will be anonymized, to ensure our customers can be frank about their opinion. We have also convinced other internal services departments to implement this system.

The library staff is so committed to customer satisfaction, that we will link fifty percent of our bonus to the results of the customer satisfaction survey scorecards results."

My manager was delighted. I gave him a nice PowerPoint about this, so he could show it to his management buddies.

Of course we have tweaked the system to our best interest. Yes, the system triggers a scorecard – but only to internal services staff. So I give high grades to my buddies in catering, the mail room and meeting services and they are equally full of praise for the library.

"I did what I had to do
And saw it through without exception
I planned each charted course
Each careful step along the byway
Oh, and more, much more than this
I did it my way"

© Paul Anka

The one where we stand up for our users

It's Tuesday afternoon, slightly after lunch and I am humming along to "Good vibrations". By looping this song endlessly through the day I not only get into a peaceful trance, I also scare away most of the users. Either they don't like the song or it might be my off key voice.

As you know by now, I don't like users that much. But in a weird way, I do care about them... I even have a pet name for them: l-users (library users). It's like having in-laws: I didn't choose them, they just came with the job and somehow we need to get along. And as long as they don't get in my way and I can tease them once in a while, things are just okay.

But others should not mess with my users. That's my prerogative. So recently I had to stand up for my users...

Several months ago the powers that be decided that our records management system needed an update. As I am the application manager, I was pleased with this and looked forward to getting my hands on the newest release full of eye candy and more features to make the life of end users even more unpleasant. But then... silence... no signs of an update... no meetings... no project plan... I became nervous, so I put out some feelers in my network.

I found out that management had hired an external project manager to lead this project. Not only was it an outsider, he had also persuaded the Hades Corp top managers to label this project top secret. This meant he could run this project as he pleased and in the end hand it over to me, without involving me at all during the planning or implementation (onzichtbare tekst in pagina overgang). Well, that's not how it works around here... I just know that mister hot-shot project manager will run the project very poorly, implement the system backwards, riddled with bugs and then the poor application manager (me!) gets all the problems. And not the huge implementation bonus.

I finally found that a secret meeting about the project was held with all the stakeholders. I persuaded my manager to send me as his delegate to the meeting.

When I entered the meeting room, the project manager immediately came up to me: "Sorry, I don't think you have the right meeting, buddy, this is for the strategic steering board only." I smirked back at him: "You know very well who I am and I am here to represent the ITMPVVP – the Information Technology Major Project Visionary Vice President." The

project manager flinched just barely and hissed: "Then you may attend the meeting – but you may not speak!"

I sat through the whole meeting watching all the managers around the table being hypnotized by an overload of buzz words, fascinating looking slides filled with flow charts, claims of cost savings, pictures of cheering end users and world peace. Well, maybe the latter wasn't actually mentioned, but it certainly was implied. But it was clear to me this project would lead to a full-fledged disaster. The system would throw us back to the dark ages, and even though I am not that concerned about my users, this was even far beyond what I would do to them.

At the end of the meeting, I was the last to leave the room. The project manager approached me with a sly smile: "So, what do you think? Not that it matters... I will deliver this baby on time, under budget – after that it's yours to take care of while I enjoy my huge bonus." Was I mistaken, or did I see a small devil's tail poking out of his Armani jacket?

I sent a quick prayer to Saint Lawrence, the saint of librarians and archivists. As always I am inspired by his courage and dignity when he stood up for his users. Poor Saint Lawrence was slowly roasted on a fire, in the hope he would renounce his religion and reveal a list of his users (wealthy Christians). Did he give in? Nope. He grinded his teeth and told his executioners: "Turn me over. I am done on this side."

And my prayers are heard. Due to a divine miracle, the project manager had a freak accident in his hotel room. Apparently he decided to dry his hair while standing under the shower. This could have resulted in a deathly accident, but luckily a dark figure with a bun and thick glasses quickly shushed him out of the shower. To pay his savior for saving him, the project manager gave up his evil practices and now preaches the gospel of Dewey in far away libraries that have not adapted to the one and only classification system.

And me? I'm just happy that my flock has been saved from the evil that was upon us. Now, back to our regular scheduled plan for world domination and end user harassment.

The one with the sanitized performance review

It is Tuesday afternoon, slightly after 4 PM and I am in the library listening to the fabulous, surround sound version of Jean Michel Jarre's classic "Oxygene" album. This always stimulates the theta waves in my brain and puts me into a special relaxing mood which is needed.

Once again it is time to fill out the yearly self appraisal forms for our dear friends in Human Resources and my direct boss. I've always thought it is not exactly fair that us humble worker bees have to fill out a self-appraisal form and send that to HR and our manager before we have the appraisal, but we never get their remarks up front.

I often have the feeling HR and management don't even do anything with our reviews, they just take our forms, have a good laugh at what we filled out, point out particularly funny answers, snort, go out for a few beers and then randomly throw all application forms in the air. The ones that come face down on the floor get bad reviews, unless your boss likes the way you bring him coffee and laugh at all his jokes.

But that's just me being cynical - the performance review process it surely is based on objective criteria, scientifically relevant methods and intended to bring out the best in us.

But you can't be honest in your self appraisal, you have to sugarcoat it. Like writing a business case, completing the self appraisal form requires a mixture of fantasy, word smithing and buzzwords. Let me show you an example.

"What do you think went well this year?"

(what I wanted to answer:) After a year where every project proposal I wrote was either forgotten, postponed or undermined I think I did very well not punching several managers in the face. Also, I showed clear self control not laughing out loud at all the ridiculous questions from the l-users (library users). I am extremely proud that you guys did not find out I squandered the whole training budget on a week in the Bahama's at a so-called web 2.0 masterclass in a 5 star all-inclusive resort where I learned to water-ski.

(what I did answer:) This year I learned a lot from the active challenging of my cross-business projects, this strengthened my skills in this area. I also challenged users in their information seeking behaviors, stimulating their level of self esteem whilst enhancing their skills in information literacy. Lastly, I have been able to acquire new skills at the web 2.0 masterclass I attended.

"Looking back, what would you have done differently?"

(what I wanted to answer:) Looking back, I should not have bothered asking for any improvement projects, but just do my thing and ignore everyone else. Also, I should have learned to sleep with my eyes open to make the best use of the endless, soul crushing and dreadfully boring departmental meetings.

(what I did answer:) Looking back, I should have asked for management input for new improvement projects, before proposing them to ensure the project ideas were aligned with company priorities and received buy-in. Also, I should have stepped back from several departmental meetings and trusted my peers to make the best decisions, giving them room to grow in their leadership roles.

"What are the most important wins of this year for you?"

(what I wanted to answer:) I finally beat Carl from meeting services in Mario Kart. My manager did not notice that the strategic library vision presentation was basically the same as last year with only the date changed. I won the stare down contest during the monthly "top quality process enhancement" meetings.

(what I did answer:) I was the winner in the company wide safe driving contest. I built the new library vision presentation on best practices. I used body language to stimulate interaction with my colleagues in the "top quality process enhancement" meetings.

If an individual performance bonus would be tied to your review, what should you be awarded?

(what I wanted to answer:) All I want is more money and less sh*t from you people.

(what I did answer:) I am not just motivated by monetary rewards, but also a stimulating work environment where I am constantly being pushed to get the best out of me.

The one where we get no help whatsoever

It is Monday morning, 8.33 and already this week is ruined. The trusty old library computer makes a weird noise. A few sad bleeps, but that's all. I am afraid the hard disk may have passed away, but luckily I make my own backups ever since back office IT support was outsourced. All I want is a new hard disk, so I can restore my backup. But in order to get a real IT person (do they still exist?) at my desk to replace the hard disk, I need a help desk ticket number.

Recently our help-desk was re-shored after a survey pointed out that nobody actually called the help-desk anymore following the off-shoring. First, management was pleased as this clearly indicated that IT was just working fine. However, comments from the survey indicated there still were many problems, but Hades employees just didn't call the help-desk anymore out of sheer frustration.

Our management made a bold decision to re-shore the help-desk back home. To be more precise, they awarded the help-desk contract to the local job centre which is across the road from our office. A win-win situation: Hades Corporation pays a mere penny and all the unemployed people can learn "on the job" how to be demeaning to people and anticipate a future career involving a headset.

"Welcome to the Hades Corporation no help whatsoever desk. We are understaffed, underpaid and hardly skilled, but at least we speak English."

(10 minutes cheesy piano renditions of sappy 80s ballads, interrupted every 2 minutes by "Your call is important to us. All our operators are currently busy talking to each other, clipping their toe nails or surfing the web. Once we feel like it, we may actually answer your call.")

"Hello, how may I help you?"

"Hello, well, my computer does not start. It makes weird noises when booting up."

"Can I start a remote desktop sharing session?"

"No, my computer does not start at all, so I cannot start programs."

"Oh well, I just follow a script here, it's not like I know anything about computers or even am remotely motivated to help you for the measly payment I get. Is the power-plug correctly inserted into the wall socket?"

"Listen, that's not it... this is a problem with my hard disk."

"Sir, I am under clear orders to follow the script from the knowledge base."

"Yeah but... "

"Can you insert the rescue floppy into the floppy drive?"

"Floppy? This is 2008 - floppies are extinct!"

"Sir, please follow the script with me or else I cannot help you - please put the floppy in the floppy drive."

"I don't have a floppy or a floppy drive!"

"YOU MUST HAVE A FLOPPY AND A FLOPPY DRIVE! That's is what it says here on my screen!"

"Once again, I DON'T have a floppy or a floppy drive!"

"Sir, I am trying to help you here but you are making it very difficult for me. If you have lost your floppy or floppy drive, which is company property by the way, can you ask your colleague to borrow you a floppy and a floppy drive?"

"No, of course not, you help desk-dimwit, nobody has floppies anymore! Please skip this nonsense and create a ticket to have my hard disk replaced."

"Sorry, I can only assign a ticket number once we complete the script... so let's get back to the floppy."

Five minutes later I am across the road, using a hammer, nails and wooden planks to block the doors of the employment center where our help-desk resides. One my way out, several colleagues asked me what I was going to do... once I explained, they all came along to help. Isn't it wonderful how people will become an instant group once they have a common goal? One guy even brought barbed wire!

The one where we are micromanaged

It is slightly after teatime in the library and I am wearing my Hawaii shirt, sipping a piña colada and humming along to the “Hawaii & surf” music channel on my computer. My boss is back from holiday, and for the first time ever I'm happy to have him back... Let me explain... .

In general I use my manager's holiday to fix all the bad decisions he made in the past year and in general have a great time, without worrying about being interrupted for non-library relevant requests.

My boss always hated taking holidays, as he was sure Hades Corp would go down when he was not around 24/7. Funny how all managers have this idea of being indispensable... Every year he would take his mandatory minimum amount of vacation days, but still reply to e-mails and call the office every day several times. He was then always completely stressed out by balancing the demands of his family, who wanted to enjoy the holiday and his addiction to being in touch with the office.

It was always very tempting for us to freak him out, for instance by sending e-mails like “Hi boss, the CFO has slashed your budget proposal. But I have said that's ok, since you overestimated several projects anyway.” He was always so happy to be back in the office, I think I have even seen him gently caressing his leather chair on his return.

This year his wife demanded he would not be in touch with the office; otherwise she would destroy his collection of rare vintage Polynesian stamps.

My boss took a one-day course “Your Blackberry will be fine without you – how to survive a holiday without access to e-mail and phone” and even thought about delegating responsibilities. But the idea of someone else lower in the food chain doing his job gave him the jitters.

Then he made the worst decision of his career so far. He hired an interim manager to take his place during the two weeks he was on holiday. This interim manager happened to be his brother's son who just finished his MBA – which of course means that you can handle anything and know everything. They agreed to have daily contact by fax, which my boss had arranged to be secretly inserted into his morning paper at the hotel. If he then had to send instructions, he would ask the hotel concierge in code to send e-mails on his behalf. Something like: “the croissant at breakfast was very tasty with peanut butter” would mean “the savings

target for the new off site data storage can be reduced, send a new proposal."

Just when I thought it could not get worse – the two week interim manager turned out to be a micromanager with a bit of knowledge. This is one of the most dangerous kinds of managers, as they want to be involved in everything but only have a slight idea what the work is actually about. His wife volunteered in a library during college, which made him a world expert on libraries.

On his first day, he went around the office introducing himself and started to ask endless questions:

"Why do you use the Dewey Decimal Classification? What is the benefit of that versus the Cutter Expansive Classification?"

"I want a full run down of all planned and unforeseen expenses you plan to make in the next two weeks plus the considered alternatives and business cases."

"I want to be on top of all the issues. Before you sent an e-mail, let me see it first. I will correct your mistakes in red font and then return it to you for improvement."

"I worry about the productivity of this department. I am sure you can do a lot more in less time. Tomorrow I will bring my stopwatch and spend the whole day next to you so I can observe how you work."

As you can imagine, this does not create the right atmosphere. I could already see the dweeb standing besides me, telling me to "move the mouse up – UP... click!".

My passive aggressive assistant Sue tried to get rid of him by planning a meeting with him in a remote meeting room. She used an excuse to borrow his cell phone, stepped outside the meeting room where she locked the door behind her and wandered off. Unfortunately he escaped through the window.

I tried to send a subtle signal by superglue-ing everything in his office to the desk or wall. The video of him trying to pick up a pen or using the mouse has been a hit on YouTube, but he had everything replaced within a few hours.

So the only thing we could do was to fight fire with fire.... I send a fax to the hotel where our manager was staying, praising the interim managers way of working. I went over the top to applaud his initiatives, how top managers were very pleased with him and that the rumor was the interim manager could do the original manager's job for less money.

Within two days my boss was back from holiday due to unforeseen developments in "the market" which required his presence.

I may not like him that much, but at least he does not interfere with my daily work. As the saying goes: you don't know what you've got 'till it's gone.

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The one where we benefit from outsourcing

It is Wednesday afternoon in the library and I am lip-syncing to Kraftwerk's classic "Autobahn" album. Earlier this month I smelled something in the air... Was it a rare, first edition book in decay? Was it the smell of fear from the recent new hires? No... it was the nasty smell of unwanted change.

It started out with several men carrying tape measures walking around our offices, looking at floor plans and taking notes on clipboards while mumbling. Mumbling is never a good sign.

A week later we all received a memo about project "Smart refit":

"As always your fearless management is focused on improving the bottom line. During a recent three-day smart building management workshop in a remote location with plenty of golf and drinks, we had an epiphany: let's not renew the lease on several buildings around town and aim to get the optimum out of the buildings we own. In your terms that means squeezing more people in less office space. Don't think of it as a pure cost reduction, it will also increase cross-departmental bonding, shorten communication lines and reduce global warming. We are sure we can reduce the heating in the building as we will all generate enough body heat.

On a related note we have concluded that all middle management need their own office (but without a window of course) to discuss sensitive matters, make up fictitious targets and play Solitaire. Last but not least we will increase the number of meeting rooms as you can never have enough meeting rooms."

The impact for the library would be enormous. We had to reduce to half of our current floor space. All those scruffy books, journals and library staff where just a waste of space and oxygen.

I was able to successfully prevent the first idea: throw out half of the collection. My business case clearly outlined the value and ROI of the print collection, so I reached a compromise. I would find an off site storage vendor that would house half of the collection and offer a service to deliver a book or a journal volume within an hour of request. And all of this for a nickel and a dime.

When a librarian is stuck between a rock and a hard place, (s)he gets the best ideas. I told my boss I knew a very good company that could provide this service, was very respected in the industry, had very affordable prices and that I would personally vouch for a successful move. But

when I would have to work according to the official Hades corporation rules of contracting and procurement, it would take ages. First I would have to draw up requirements, perform a market scan, split requirements into must haves and nice to haves, gather industry benchmark data, issue a RFI (request for information), RFP (request for proposal), RFB (request for bribes) and a RFQ (request for quotation). Hence, this would take forever. Or we could do this unofficially, get it done through my buddies in the real estate department and be the first department to give back half of the floor space to management.

My boss recognizes an opportunity to score with his managers so he agreed to approve my choice of off site storage vendor as long as the project would be done in a week and I would personally be accountable for everything. Every manager loves a decision that will score with the higher powers and if it goes wrong, have someone to shift the blame to.

A quick call to my pal in the real estate kicked off project "the stealth off site library". Being the one and only records manager, I have responsibility for all the paper and physical records. Since most of the are confidential, management did not want them stored off site. Also, they were too cheap to invest into a proper off site storage vendor. So they gave me a large part of the basement, which is so rundown that nobody ever wants to be there. My part of the basement is locked for security, so nobody except me and my buddy in logistics knows what we store there. And let me tell you - there is enough space to keep half of the library collection there.

After office hours, we moved half of the library collection to the basement. We then created a service request form for retrieving materials from the "off site" storage area. My boss gets charged \$5 by the real estate department for every request. The guys in logistics and I have calculated we will have enough money for a jacuzzi in the basement by the end of the year...

The one where we get a promotion

It is Thursday night, way past office hours and I am still in the library with a bottle of non-alcoholic champagne to celebrate my promotion to senior assistant manager of library, records and information services.

During my annual appraisal session last month with my manager I almost fell off my chair when he asked me whether it wasn't time for a promotion. A manager suggesting me to get a promotion? Was this an alternate universe? Was I dreaming?

No, it was for real – he wanted me to get promoted. Not because I was doing such a fine job but being underpaid... nope. My boss himself was looking for a promotion, but he did not have enough staff reporting to him with the right pay grades. So in order to qualify for a promotion, my manager needed to promote the staff below him – logical.

Well, let's promote the librarian to senior librarian. That sounds easy.

But Hades Corporation would not be the enormous, bureaucratic and inefficient organization it prides itself to be if they hadn't installed a best practice worthy process to discourage staff from even THINKING about asking for a promotion. This all in line with the company finance manager's slogan: the best cost saving is a cost not made at all.

The basis of the whole process is getting support from your manager. In my case, I was lucky – but if you can't get along with your manager, you have no chance of a promotion ever. The rest of the promotion process is "employee driven", i.e. you have to figure this out on your own with an application designed by a programmer who hates people.

The human resources department for once buried the hatchet with the IT department and invented the SYTYCGAP system (So You Think You Can Get A Promotion). This combines the best of both worlds: the meaningless corporate doublespeak of HR plus the plan, implement and forget mentality of the IT department.

First of all you need to check the competence requirements for your job. Right. The job of librarian was not in the system, as this job was never interesting enough to be formally described. The bad news was that I first had to create the competence requirements myself and then had them mystified by the human resources department. The good news is that I made sure the competence requirements were an exact match of my skills, knowledge and behaviors. When my job competence profile was "improved" by HR, it had 38 different items to fill out.

Secondly the competences consist of skills building blocks and skill building blocks are grouped according to the Hades Corporation Group Leadership Framework. If your head is not spinning by now and you can explain these concepts without laughing, you have passed step 2.

Last, but not least I had to provide evidence of the level of skills the system expected of me. You can't just claim to have skill level 3b in "enabling an information management architecture", "successfully embraces different values" or "effectively leverages information assets". No, you need someone in the organization to confirm your claim. This weeds out anybody in the organization who does not have friends, as nobody in their right mind would state something for someone else if there isn't a benefit for them.

Luckily I have lots of friends on the organization and managers who owe me favors. In this case I thought it would be best to get an impressive friend to support my promotion.

Benjamin Chen is Hades Corporation's Chief Chaos Officer. Nobody really knows what he does all day, but once every year he comes up with an idea or invention that makes the company enormous amounts of money. Besides being a reclusive inventor, he also is a pistol sharpshooter, speaks 14 languages and he plays the piano blindfolded with one hand while simultaneously solving Rubik's cube with the other hand.

In general he does not attend meetings. When he does, he will be in the back of the room practicing his ninja skills and at the end of the meeting summarize the way forward with a thought provoking haiku like:

Bottom up, top down...
How to define a strategy?
We always debate

Or

A visionary
builds products for the future
but with no market

Benjamin is feared and respected by all, but also a very good friend of the library. He is notorious for never returning books, but is always a very good ally when the future of the library is at stake. So he was more than happy to write the following note:

"The librarian is a pivotal enabler of research and development at Hades Corporation. He is a highly skilled information guru who plays a key role in providing technical and scientific support to staff. He gears the service provided flexibly towards the requirements of the employee needing his service. Last but not least he is an adept and responsive provider of access to the complicated databases in our industry. Given the level of expertise, skill and versatility, I have no hesitation in recommending the librarian for a well deserved and overdue promotion."

And with that my promotion application form was complete. Of course the HR cycle took various levels of approval, rubber-stamping, authorizing and filing before it was final. But at least now I get pay 2 bucks more per hour! (before taxes).

The one where we negotiate with the vendor

It's a new year, a new budget to burn, a new batch of new hires to harass and a full year ahead for obnoxiousness.

The end of every year is always a very busy one as all the licenses for the electronic journals, e-books and databases are up for renewal. It's that time of the year where I have to work out how to match the decreasing budget with the price increase from the publishers. As most publishers are monopolists, it is very hard to negotiate. Every year our procurement department is baffled by dealing with a monopolist - how are they supposed to benchmark prices and play one vendor against the other? Every year I have to convince them that you cannot get e-journals from 20 different sources at competing prices. And no, you cannot get every article or e-book for free via Google.

The worst thing is always the price negotiations with a monopolist. I have always imagined the following discussion at a publisher before them go to meet a librarian for renewal discussions:

Junior sales weasel: "Ok, as you asked me to I have pulled up the file for the customer. What is the new price we will quote them?"

Senior sales weasel: "Easy there, pricing is a very complex art with many variables that come into play. I look at usage, content value, market dynamics, client reputation, the stock market, the shoe size and of course my expected Christmas bonus."

Junior: "Well, how did you then determine the original price when they started with electronic journals and books?"

Senior: "We invent a large number. We see whether we like that number. Then we develop a formula based on historical print holdings, a globalisation fee, a hosting fee, an indexing fee and a one-time set up fee. That formula is precisely the number we want. We then made sure that every price model except for the all-you-can-eat package is unattractive."

Junior: "How do you make them chose for the all-you-can-eat package if that might not be what they want?"

Senior: "That, my young friend, is a trick of the trade. The library may only look at one small part of the package. Of course that does not create enough revenue to warrant the whopping Christmas bonus I was looking for. So what I do is set up a "free trial" on all our e-journals and e-books. I then send out e-mails to different users at the company telling them about a one month free access to all the content. The word gets

around and soon all the users are using a huge amount of content. I tell the librarian that it is a "demand measurement exercise" to "optimize spending versus usage patterns". After a month, all the users are used to having all the content and I suspend the trial. The users start demanding access and I send the librarian a proposal for the all-you-can-eat package which is priced attractively. He finds the budget somehow, signs in blood and makes the users happy. Then after one year we start hiking up the prices based on increased usage - and since the users have grown used to having access, there is no way out."

Junior: "You also told me about a wonderful invention called Dee Ar EM to further annoy the librarian and have more control over the users?"

Senior: "DRM (Digital Rights Management) is a wonderful invention. Every publisher has invented a different version of DRM to restrict usage of downloaded content. We can restrict printing, copying, sharing copies... basically everything people could do with a paper version, we can prevent. Brilliant. And we can interfere with the competition as our DRM plug-in makes the plug-in from the competition crash."

Junior: "I get it. As you also asked me, I have worked with our legal staff to create a new license document. I think you will be pleased with this, as I have increased the amount of legal complex words by 50%, added more hidden clauses, used the tiniest print I could find and in a footnote even make the librarian sign away his soul to us."

Senior: "That's the spirit! So before we go over to the sucker... I mean, customer... let's drop by the car dealer so I can pick out my new car which I will buy from my Christmas bonus."

The one where we provide lessons learned

It is Friday afternoon, just before the long dark tea time of the soul ("The Long Dark Teatime of the Soul is that state which one's soul enters at about 3 o'clock on a Sunday afternoon, when one has had all the baths that one can usefully have that day and no matter how long one stares at an article in the paper one will never actually read it, nor use the revolutionary new pruning technique it describes" - Douglas Adams). In the background the soundtrack to "American beauty" is playing and I am staring at the wall, trying to come up with input for the latest management idea...

With the financial crisis in full effect, management is looking for cost cutting everywhere. If you were to ask me, if we cut back on management meetings we would save a lot of money. Management meetings usually have a dozen highly paid executives wasting time in a room, coming up with clueless plans. But then, if these highly paid executives were not in meetings, there is nothing really useful they could do instead.

So the latest brilliant idea is to cut back significantly on training and replace it with "a culture of lessons learned":

"Hades Corporation is a knowledge driven organisation. We need to exploit our own knowledge assets further to leverage our investments into intellectual capital. The new lessons learned program is aimed at identifying, sharing and using lessons learned based on our own experiences and insights. This will result in enhanced productivity, efficiency and employee morale - after all, we all have a lesson we can share with the rest!"

Too bad these managers never learn from their own miserable failings in the past. But of course, being a dutiful employee I will contribute to this initiative by teaching lessons:

1. A l-user (library user) calls me to complain that his / her personal storage folder in the document management system is full. I will quickly investigate whether any material in their personal folder has blackmail value for the future and if so, copy that for myself. Following that I will delete all the files in their folder and tell the user I have given them new storage space.

Lesson learned: l-users need to think before asking and phrase questions more precisely. They should ask, "my personal storage area is full,

can you give me additional space?". The best practice answer is "No", by the way.

2. I will use the standard desktop sharing software available on every computer to secretly monitor search behaviour. Normally this software is used only by the helpdesk to solve problems, but I regularly use it to give virtual training. I have found out that via a simple hack I can activate the screen sharing on the user end without the l-user knowing it. This way I can monitor the l-user's search behaviour and give helpful feedback via on screen messages: "NO! That's the WRONG database! Try again", "Why oh why are you searching with just 1 keyword????!" and "Oh come on, don't you know that Google offers only non-validated, low quality information???"

Lesson learned: think before you do and Big Brother Librarian is watching you.

The one where we leverage the book club

It is Thursday afternoon in the library and I am sipping my green tea while listening to a relaxation cd, specifically designed for librarians: sounds of pages softly being turned, people whispering, books gently being reshelfed and librarians shushing people.

This week I learned (again) that even though I have many good ideas to improve how this organisation works, I should not pursue them - or at least have someone else suggest them and then get swamped by the procedures, politics and e-mail cascades.

On Monday I had a great idea to improve the so called off boarding process, which is the haphazard process that should be followed when employees leave the company. Of course Hades Corp has automated that as (and I quote from our intranet): "off boarding is an integral part of the global employee management system, We have automated many of the time-consuming tasks associated with processing employee terminations or separations. Our off boarding is a consistent process and uses artificial intelligence for gathering relevant information, triggering time-critical actions (e.g. conducting exit interviews, notifying payroll systems and benefits partners, etc.) and it reduces the processing costs and compliance risks associated with employment termination."

In reality off boarding is a series of e-mails sent to the manager (who is far too busy and does not care anymore, as employee X is leaving anyway), the human resources focal point (who is offshored to a cost advantageous country, and basically just tries to survive the sheer amount of admin work for the remaining staff) and the employee who is leaving (who considers him- or herself "untouchable"). The result is that after that employee leaves there is a whole range of problems: invoices come in and nobody knows what to do, systems have passwords that nobody knows, the ex-employee is still listed as a contact on the intranet, library books are never returned etc.

So for some strange reason I had the idea that we could improve this by simply connecting different systems to each other to create a checklist of all information related to the employee who is off boarding: a list of books they borrowed, a list of contracts in their name, outstanding invoices etc. That list could then be sent to the manager and the employee, requiring them to tick this off before the employee leave or otherwise both of them have to pay a penalty. I went wrong at the "simply" part. Nothing is simple anymore. We even had a special program here

internally to reduce the amount of red tape - the program was called "decomplexify". Simplification was probably a too simple word.

I was surprised to find that there was an actual person I could talk to about my improvement idea, instead of a lengthy form to fill out. Let me recap the conversation I had with the business and solution analyst:

"This is Brandon from the business process improvement team - please tell me about your valuable idea which we will listen to because we care as much as you about making Hades Corp the best it can be"

(I explained my idea to him)

"Ah. Good idea. Yes. Let me just see how we could make this work. Right. First of all, I will label this as a new set of enhancement requirements for the employee management system. I will engage with the architecture and standards team to see how this fits into their landscape model. Then I will have a face to face with the appropriate members of the functional steering committee to make sure your requests are assigned to the appropriate functional portfolio. Once that is done the functional portfolio analyst will analyze, assess, coordinate, prioritize and approve the set of requests. This is of course depending on the impact of your enhancement requests, as we may have to escalate this to the business administrative systems enhancement governance committee. They define the strategic administrative priorities and make appropriate decision as required consistent with their accountability. To ensure proper funding for your enhancement requirements, we will have to liaison with sponsors within the functional administrative units. Are you still with me?"

"Well, Brandon - that sounds like it will take forever, can you tell me how long this will take?"

"Sorry, as a business analyst I cannot answer practical things like deadlines or timeframes, as that is not within my responsibility. But rest assured that I will be generating a lot of forms for you and get you wrapped up in a whirlwind of meetings with IT architects, portfolio managers, steering committee advisors and business analysts to keep you from your normal work."

"Brandon, let's just forget about it, ok?"

"It was nice talking to you and I will send feedback to our management that the employee management system is meeting all requirements, as nobody is suggesting improvements. Have a nice day!"

Luckily there is as always the official way of doing things, and the way to get things done. In this case, I just happen to run the local book club... and several wives of senior managers are members. Yesterday evening we had our monthly book club session, and before we started to discuss "The time traveller's wife" we talked about what was bothering us. The nice ladies in my club were concerned about my fruitless efforts to improve the work culture at Hades Corporation. We talked about how their husbands were more concerned by their targets and bonuses, instead of helping their employees. And book club members help each other out... so this morning I received a personal phone call from the senior vice president of global IT, asking me to meet with him later today to discuss my highly interesting improvement idea. When I thanked him, I could swear I hear him mumble "yeah, I just want my wife to stop nagging me about this...".

The one where we survive the support staff managers meeting

It is Monday afternoon and I am having a small celebration in the library, as the blog has reached the 400 subscriber mark and I have survived the monthly support staff managers meeting.

The monthly support staff managers meeting is by far the most soul crushing meeting I have ever encountered. However, I have to attend as otherwise library hostile decisions will get taken by the others. One time I was ill and that day the rest decided to switch paperclip suppliers without consulting me, especially because the library has very specific paperclip requirements to clip circulation slips to magazines. Rest assured I took my revenge by later on ripping out selected pages of their desk copies of the dictionary.

The other attendees are from other support departments: IT support, accounting, human resources, office management and internal communications. Like the library, all these departments are pretty much seen as second rate by management and the employees. Support departments don't get invited to attend strategic meetings or future roadmap workshops. That leaves the support staff managers meeting for us as the main opportunity to execute our office politics and power play.

The meeting itself has no real agenda, as everyone keeps bringing up his or her own personal issues during the meeting. This prevents the others from being able to prepare for issues like the theme for the annual office Christmas party, the office supply policy or the mandatory font type for the intranet. The person bringing up the issue has the element of surprise and can try to lobby with his or her potential allies before the meeting.

The discussion is always very interesting, as the issue discussed is not the issue at stake. No, there is a myriad of underlying personal grudges, hidden agendas, sabotaging and personal vendettas. As I have been in the same job for many years, I can now often predict the outcome of every discussion as I know who dislikes whom and what everyone's personal dislikes are.

If you were to record the meeting, I could provide an insightful commentary track: "the office manager has just proposed to introduce a mandatory registration form for office supplies. Before the meeting she has bribed the HR manager with the promise of giving him the first option on an office with a window being available. The proposal is on the

table... and the accounting manager is immediately up in arms about this. He is straining himself to control his anger, as he rants about endless rules and procedures which have no real effect on the bottom line. Underneath this anger is his frustration of being in the noisiest office of the department, right next to the clunky old photo copier and fax machine. He is also still angry at the human resources department for not allowing him to apply for a promotion 4 years ago."

To add to the liveliness of the meeting, the chairperson for the meeting is rotated amongst the members. Everyone looks forward to his or her turn to blatantly dominate the meeting. It is not a lot of power, but as we have little power outside the meeting, we enjoy this brief, but very enjoyable wave of power.

So once again I came out of the meeting alive and with only a few lost battles. But sometimes losing a battle is needed to win the war in the long run. I am feeling upbeat and thankful for getting out of the meeting and decide to share my positive feelings with my l-users (library users): I will not post the list of staff with overdue books and reports to the front page of the intranet but instead just sneer at them when they return the items.

The one where we stimulate a knowledge sharing culture

It is Thursday evening in the library and it is crowded with staff members, all in a good mood and feeling relieved after a life changing week. Let me take you back in time to explain...

A few weeks ago I ran into the Chief Knowledge Officer (CKO) in the hallway, and he looked very tired and heading for a nervous breakdown. I took him to the library, put him in one of our comfy reading chairs, fetched him a cappuccino from the secret library coffee machine in the back (instead of the brown stuff coming from the coffee machines in the hallway which vaguely resembles coffee) and I asked him what was wrong.

He told me that his knowledge management progress was stalling and he could not see how to improve the knowledge sharing culture. Staff were clinging to old fashioned e-mail and kept everything to themselves instead of embracing knowledge sharing and consulting expert communities. The CKO sobbed that the board of directors had threatened to cut knowledge management completely as the bean counters did not see progress on their management dashboards.

Now, you all now that librarians are service minded. We put the customer first. I do that too - especially if it can benefit me as well. And I recognized a lot in the CKO's troubles: my colleagues would hide behind e-mail, preferably on their blackberries to "communicate" - even with co-workers in a room across the hall. Managers resorted to recording web casts and putting them on the intranet instead of meeting staff face to face - the good thing about web casts is that staff don't have a chance to criticize or comment. And e-mails are easier to ignore than a real person.

This all resulted in most employees resorting to their office or cubicle, not knowing their co-workers and certainly not using knowledge bases or consulting experts. It was easier to google for some keywords, copy & paste that into an e-mail or PowerPoint. Making a small effort to find a real person to learn from their experience or perhaps coming over to the library to discuss a literature search was too much to ask. Just last week, a colleague from one floor up set up a teleconference to discuss a new database alert profile. When I suggested he'd come down to the library and we would discuss this in person, he said he tried to meet virtually all the time as he wanted to treat everyone the same and not meet me face to face, while he could not meet face to face with his colleague in India.

With that in mind I told the CKO I would help him. In this case, desperate times call for desperate measures so I called Ivana Paichikova. She is a long-time network guru in Hades Corporation and has power over large parts of our servers and networks. We became friends when I helped her daughter with her high school homework assignments for which I supplied quite a number of articles from relevant journals. She works in one of our offices in Eastern Europe and told me she gets most of her work done via her "connections" (I never dared to ask what type of "connections" she meant, I am afraid it is more Godfather type connections rather than local chamber of commerce type of connections).

Ivana was glad to hear from me: "Librarian, good to hear from you - you need a favour? No problem. Is someone making trouble? Do you want me to make them disappear? Or should they "suddenly" opt to retire?"

I explained to her about the CKO's troubles and my idea to drastically change employee behaviours by taking e-mail, internet access and printing offline for a few days. I hoped that such a drastic change would trigger a change in behaviour. She was silent for a moment and then agreed to help, as this offered her the chance to do some necessary upgrades which were easier to do without those pesky users being online. We agreed that during a regular backup in the weekend, somehow problems would arise which would impact our e-mail, internet and printing servers - Ivana would personally guarantee management this would be resolved as soon as possible. As nobody in headquarters had any real technical knowledge (remember off shoring and outsourcing), Ivana was sure she could stall them for a few days without real problems.

On Monday morning this week the plan started to work: all staff noticed that they could not open their e-mail, their blackberries did not work and the network was not accessible. Everything came to a grinding halt. Employees did not know what to do and tried different ways to get to their e-mail or the internet. There was a lot of gnashing teeth, frustrated clicking and cries of despair. After the initial technology related anger had subdued, people started to venture out of their offices or cubicles to look for help.

Many of the employees met around the coffee machines or in the corridor to share their frustrations. Since their computers were largely useless, staff tried to figure out how to get their work done without their office computers. Those who had personal smart phones with Internet access became the linking pin to communications with the outside world.

Others who needed to communicate with different departments became daredevils and used maps to walk to other departments for meetings.

Since nobody could access their calendar, regular meetings were all cancelled. I put up a notice that the library was offering free cappuccino and seating for staff, so quickly the library became the place to have impromptu meetings. It was heart-warming to see staff connecting faces to names, meeting colleagues they only knew from e-mails and bonding over the free donuts I sneaked in.

On day 2, improvising became normal. Several colleagues brought their own desktop printers to work and offered others to print documents from USB drives if needed. Senior staff sat down with groups of interested employees to explain solutions using whiteboard and real interactive discussions. In the library staff were consulting books to acquire knowledge, discussions were held in all corners of the building to solve problems, using pieces of paper and pens to document potential ideas. I pointed employees to colleagues whom I knew would be able to help them and I offered the library meeting room to the "Blackberry addicts rehabilitation group" who ran counselling sessions all day.

Ivana and I knew we had started to change the culture in our company, so on Thursday we started to bring back network services very slowly. I posted hourly updates on the library notice board of what servers were back online, for which user groups e-mail was accessible and this really helped to bring staff together. When at 7pm I could announce that due to heroic efforts of our network support staff everything was back online, everyone cheered. And I just happened to have some good bottles of wine hidden behind the reference desk to toast...

The one where "good enough" just doesn't do it for me

It is Thursday afternoon in the library and I am working on one of my personal projects to make the world a better place: putting Vogon poetry to music. I have found out that combining the fine Vogon poetry with polka music played on bagpipes makes a very interesting new form of art. The elegant choice of words by the Vogons is strengthened by the bagpipe music. Oh, if only I could describe in words how the following Vogon verse sounds in surround sound bagpipe music:

Oh freddled gruntbuggly,
Thy micturations are to me
As plurdled gabbleblotchits
On a lurgid bee
That mordiously hath bitled out
Its earted jurtles

For those those who have no clue what I am talking about, please demand half of your college tuition back and complain to your parents as an important part of your education is missing. Your homework for next week is to read Douglas Adams' "Hitchhikers' guide to the galaxy".

But I digress.

Earlier this week my customer friendliness was put to the test. The friendliness lost. Let me explain: on Monday morning I had just arrived in the library

and I was in the middle of my normal morning routine. Turning on the lights, greeting the books, turning on the coffee machine, saluting the life size statue

of Mr. Dewey and booting up the computer. I was rudely interrupted by a visitor running through the door, who was yelling at me - this already broke two of the sacred library rules. It was the senior vice president of marketing, a very loud talking man with a loud suit. He is not a frequent user of the library, so I was surprised to see him.

"Librarian", he shouted, "I need your help!". Well, that's at least a good start.

"I have a meeting with our board of directors at 6pm about a paradigm shifting opportunity that could change the way we think about marketing. I need data, lots of it to build my case! I need facts, figures, the

whole show - and you are my man. You are the knowledge gatekeeper, my fearless scout who can get me what I need!! But I need it FAST!"

I saw an opportunity here to impress a potential new customer, so I asked him: "Ok, I can help you of course - please sit down so we can discuss what you need, so I can prepare my literature search."

"No can do, library boy, time is money - gotta run - I have a videoconference coming up about a national campaign worth a thousand times your library budget.

But get me all the info on the impact of social media on brand loyalty!"

"But you have to tell me a bit more to make sure I can find the right information... "

The marketing senior vice president shook his head and ran out the door shouting: "I trust you, just get me what I need before 5pm, so I can put it in the presentation. And remember: money is not a problem, your input is of pivotal importance for the future of marketing in this company! Gotta go!"

I realized this was a great challenge which required my full attention to pull this off. I put my passive aggressive assistant Sue at the front desk, which would make sure no phone call or real l-user (library user) would get past her.

At my desk I put on my headphones, put Tori Amos' "Tales of a librarian" album on repeat and started to do what I do best (well, at least the one thing I do best after being obnoxious): finding, filtering and analyzing information. With one click of my mouse I opened a set of thesauri and industry vocabularies so I could quickly determine which keywords to use. Woosh - I then opened the command line at my favorite database host. Quickly over to the master index of databases to find out which of the gazillion databases would be best for this search, handpicking the most relevant databases whilst keeping an eye on the costs of using them. Zoom - dive into a selected set of databases, quickly entering the perfect search query balancing the keywords, synonyms and Boolean. I gave myself a compliment for balancing precision and recall.

With complete concentration I de-duplicated all the search results, clustered them and I imported the references into my visualization software. Without breaking a sweat, I quickly identified the most relevant search results and weeded out the rest. Quickly I drank my energy drink and then I was ready for finding the full text articles from the references I

found. Thanks heavens I have a fully automated link resolver installed which automatically looks up the references in the list of full text journals we have available. A smaller set was not full text available, so I used the company credit card to download them via pay-per-view.

So now all the relevant articles and reports were stored as full text documents on my pc, but I needed to analyze them in order to report back to the manager.

From my librarian's toolkit I pulled out the full text clustering engine, which indexes all the full text documents and then visualizes them on my screen. I then spent the remaining time until 4.30pm reading the relevant documents, making notes and summarizing all information into a few high-information dense PowerPoint slides.

With pride I looked at my work, this being one of the finest jobs I had ever done and under severe pressure. Knowing that I would impress the senior vice president, I knew it was worth the effort.

I put my brilliant masterpiece on my usb stick and took the elevator to the top floor, where the top management has their plush offices. I entered the office of the senior vice president of marketing, and noticed he was working on his PowerPoint presentation. I coughed to make my presence known. He looked up and seemed startled: "Oh, yes... you have some information for me?"

"Not just information, I have a brilliant summary of all the important articles, industry reports and patents related to the topics you requested. Everything neatly summarized in a handful of slides, with facts, figures and references to back it up. This will be the killer for your presentation!"

"Ah, well, you see... I did some searching myself and found some good info on a blog somewhere. So I copied that into my presentation."

"Excuse me? You prefer a blog of unknown quality and source above my professional masterpiece?"

"Well, the stuff I found was good enough - and I got it fast, it took you hours to compile your work. Really, thanks for the effort, but I'll just go with what I've got."

At that point I had steam coming out of my ears. But as my mentor always advised me: "Don't get mad, get even".

I decided that if mister marketing thought a blog was "good enough" information for a vital presentation to the board, I'd give him "good enough" on other fronts... let's see how he liked that:

- I tweaked his personal intranet search engine to include vaguely related search results, should be "good enough";
- I worked with my buddy in e-mail support to change the spam filter settings for the managers' mailbox from "perfect" to "good enough";
- I reworked the formulas for his budget reporting on the intranet portal to round off to the nearest million;
- from now on, every official company document he files will be dumped into the "general" folder instead of exactly in the right project folder;
- I switched his Financial Times personal subscription to the local newspaper, that's "good enough" information for him...
- I changed his contact details on the intranet employee directory to "good enough": room number - somewhere on the top floor and I listed his personal home phone number as the main contact number;
- and just to be obnoxious, I listed his private cell phone number on the front page of the intranet listed under "Hades Corp HR needs your help in these times of financial constraints. Call this number anonymously to suggest which manager can be laid off without remorse in your opinion."

The one where we pick up a sport

Due to the financial crisis, the bean counters in charge are having a field day. All their craziest ideas are now getting attention from management who want to save money everywhere. All the top managers want to outdo each other on the global Hades Corporation cost saving dashboard.

The IT department is replacing flat panel displays with old, discarded monitors who were gathering dust in the basement. These old monitors may not present the best display, but they do generate heat - so we can turn down the heating in the building.

The site services department is chipping in by introducing "staff participation in office environment". This means we have to water the plants ourselves and are each assigned a window which we are supposed to clean. A brilliant suggestion was also to use old print outs in the printer, as very often the other side of the paper sheet is still empty and therefore usable.

Human Resources (HR) thinks big and decided that last year's performance bonuses are cancelled. Well, except for the top managers, whose employment contracts are so complex and binding that HR doesn't even dare to bring it up. But the top managers have shown compassion and have only taken 50% of their outrageous bonuses. Our CEO has stated that he wants to lead by example and is therefore not buying a second private jet. He will continue to use the old one, even though that is already 8 months old and clearly not state of the art.

To show that our company still cares about us, the new red herring is a program where all employees can pick a sport and the company will refund 50% of the costs involved for the first year. Of course there are limitations: a limit of \$1000, you need receipts for everything, and the sport has to be linked to your skills enhancement.

I am not a big sports fan, but I finally found an exciting sport that combines concentration, quick reflexes and has a clear link to my library skills: rubber stamp throwing. This combines the longstanding library tradition of rubber stamps with skills from darts.

On my belt I now have a series of rubber stamps, each with a different logo: "please return to the library", "confidential material - destroy after use", "discarded from the library", etc. I have practised my skills and can now throw stamps with eerie precision on targets. Years ago I learned ninja skills at a library conference, which have come in handy in

sneaking up on unsuspecting l-users and removing overdue books from offices without the staff even seeing me. The combination of ninja skills and rubber stamp throwing is very powerful.

Rubber stamp throwing is changing my life. It keeps me fit and concentrated - plus, all l-users are now watching their back. Yesterday I was at the library front desk, fully concentrated on fighting a flame war on alt.library.dewey-rulez when I noticed an intern trying to sneak out the door with a reference book. Well, well, well... . we all know that reference books ARE not to be taken away from the library. Just as the intern stepped through the door and thought he was safe, a big rubber stamp flew across the library and knocked the reference book from his hands. He turned around, and *wham* another rubber stamp hit his forehead. Now "reference copy - use only IN library" in hard to remove ink is on his forehead.

The where we suffer from virtual meetings

Once every year all the site support services in our country meet for a one day workshop. So the managers from services like real estate, logistics, catering etc. meet to discuss common topics and align improvement plans. Usually we meet at one of our offices and after the workshop go out for dinner and bowling (we're all a bit goofy). We have about 10 managers from different offices meeting for that day, which is beneficial for fine-tuning plans, sorting out problems and getting to know each other.

But this year with the financial difficulties, no budget was made available for our workshop. Instead, we were advised to hold a virtual meeting. With all the wonderful technology like videoconferencing, teleconferencing and online collaboration tools there was of course no need to travel. Not only would we save huge amounts on travel and hotels, but we would save all the hours spent on travelling.

And all this technology was soooooo easy to use, we would need no support to put together our virtual workshop.

Let me take you to a transcript on how we spent the first part of our workshop, saving tons of money and time.

[Location 1]

Hello everyone, welcome to this virtual meeting. I see location 2 and our remote colleagues logged in, but location 3 not yet.

[Location 3]

-silence-

[Location 1]

Location 3, where are you?

[Remote colleague 1]

Location 1, I am receiving a text message from Location 3. They have problems with the videoconference connection and are currently on hold with the helpdesk.

[Remote colleague 2]

All, I have audio, but I cannot see you - is there a problem with the connection on your end?

[Location 1]

Sorry remote colleague 2, let me check everything. Wait, I will change the settings... ***POOF**

(all connections are dropped)

[Location 1]

Oh dear, oh dear, sorry, sorry, I pressed the wrong button. I will start the session again.

[Location 4]

Hello? Hello? Who is this? Is this the finance alignment session?

[Location 1]

Sorry location 4, we connected to the wrong session. We will try again. Apologies.

[Location 2 calls location 1 on mobile phone]

What happened? The screen is blank?!

[Location 1]

Sorry, the connection should come back any minute.

[Location 2]

Ok, we will get some coffee while we wait.

[Location 3]

(lots of static) Hello? *crackle* Hello? *crackle*

[Location 1]

Hello location 3. We can see you, but it seems like your audio connection has interference. Perhaps you can turn off all mobile phones?

[Remote colleague 2]

Guys, guys, I am connected. The video seems to lag behind the audio, but I don't know if that can be fixed. Are we ready to start?

[Location 1]

Sorry, remote colleague 2, we are still waiting for location 3 to have proper audio connection.

[Remote colleague 1]

Location 1, I will drop out temporarily as I need to move to another room. I was using a meeting room which had a double booking. I will grab all my stuff and find another room.

[Location 3]

(big echo on the line) Finally-finally-finally! We-we-we can-can-can see-see-see you-you-you and-and-and hear-hear-hear you-you-you. Ready-ready-ready to-to-to start-start-start!!

[Location 1]

Location 3, please mute your microphone as for some reason there is a big echo. We are also waiting for location 2 to come back from the coffee machine and for remote colleague 1 to find a new meeting room.

[Remote colleague 2]

I will wait. I have just tried to upload my slideset to the meeting management system, but I don't have permissions to add files. Can you fix that while we wait?

[Location 1]

I wish I could, but remote colleague 1 is the only one who knows how to do that. I will send him an urgent text message so he can do this once he is settled in a new meeting room. Perhaps you can already send around the slides via e-mail to all participants?

[Remote colleague 2]

I will do that.

[Location 3]

Please be aware that we are on a slower part of the network. We cannot receive large files on the corporate e-mail system, so please send a copy to my personal Hotmail account so I can retrieve it for our location.

[Location 2]

We're back! Are we all connected. so we can start the session?

[Location 1]

Please stay tuned location 2, we are just waiting for remote colleague 1 to

find a new meeting room so he can connect.

[Location 2]

Hi, we have text message from remote colleague 1 asking what the access code for the audio conference is.

[Location 1]

I will send that to him immediately. Once remote colleague 1 has joined us, we are ready to start.

[Remote colleague 1]

Yeah! I am here. But I have to leave in 30 minutes as my VP grabbed me in the hallway and wants to discuss an emergency which needs to be resolved today. Let's move quick. Where are the slides for this meeting?

At that point I threw my copy of "Library almanac 1986" at the video-conferencing screen and we all decided to go out for drinks to forget about this workshop.

We were all frustrated, angry and tired as we hadn't achieved a thing. But at least we did not spend money on travel!

The one where we give presentation advice

People will often tell me after reading my blog that I don't like management, as I often make fun of managers. Often they are right, I just can't help making fun of managers. I promise to make less fun of managers and more fun of l-users (library users). This time I will actually help managers, giving them advice on how to give presentations. I have seen hundreds of management presentations over the years, and below are valuable lessons learned and observations.

- Hide behind the desk. Stand in one location, grip the desk and try to disappear behind it.
- For every minute allocated to your presentation, you need at least 5 slides.
- Details, details! People want lots of trivial details. Tables and graphs with lots of details are recommended. Spend lots of time explaining tiny, irrelevant details.
- Presentations are a burden. Don't show any enthusiasm or interest.
- Forget the old principle- first say what you are going to say, say it and then summarize. Jump straight in, a clever audience should pay attention and figure out what you mean.
- If you are in a series of presentations, don't refer to others. Where possible tell conflicting stories or contradict the others.
- Spend 90 percent of the time on the first 25 percent of the slides. Wait until you get a warning that you are running out of time and rush through rest.
- Use a small font that is hard to read from the third row and further in the audience. Tell the audience - I know you cannot read this... But carry on anyway.
- Slide design - a bright yellow background with orange font looks fine. If it looks ok on your laptop, it should be fine in a large meeting room.
- Struggle with the remote. "Oops, what button is this". Bonus points if you can get the presentation PC to crash with the remote.
- Flip back forth looking for slides, never ever see the slides before the presentation as you want to have a "fresh view".
- Give the presentation by looking at the screen with your back to audience.

- If you are wearing a microphone, make sure it scratches against your jacket or else it should be so close to your mouth that everyone can hear you breathing.
- Read all the slides verbatim, assume nobody in the audience can read.

The one where we take a day off

It is Thursday evening in the library and I am tired of working all day to update the records management system with the new retention rules made up by the legal department. I put my feet up on my desk, turn up the speakers to hear the fabulous song "Bodhisattva" from Steely Dan and check the weather forecast. It looks like it will be a beautiful day tomorrow and it would be nice to go to the park with a good book (I found a thriller entitled "Dewey decimated" which sounds intriguing).

But taking a day off in Hades Corporation however is not an easy feat. Far from that, it actually is quite discouraging and makes you think twice if you really have the time to arrange that day off... :

- first you have to navigate to the global HR portal, log in with your user id and password (which you have to change every 3 months and must be 12 characters at least, so you write that down on a post-it note somewhere... spend 5 minutes looking under keyboard, in the drawer and underneath a stack of old Library Journals)

- open the "leave request" form

- fill out your name, department, select your manager from a drop down list (which starts at "A" and you must scroll all the way down), select the leave date requested

- close the HR portal

- open the departmental team calendar in Outlook and block the day you are on leave

- go to the project team "leave overview" spreadsheet on the intranet, try to download the spreadsheet, find it is reserved (i.e. blocked for editing) by a colleague, call colleague to release the document, download the document, enter the leave in the spreadsheet, upload the new version to the intranet

- open the time writing application. Find that the password you have in your list is not the right one. Call the help desk to have the password reset. Log in to the time writing application successfully and realize you don't know what time writing code to use for "unplanned leave". Make up a code. System rejects code. Call colleague. Enter right code.

- at the end of the year you get a request from the finance department to explain why the time writing overview of leave requests and the overview of the HR department is off by 30 minutes.

- my manager has one week to approve leave requests. If he is on leave, deletes the e-mail or in general does not feel like logging on to the HR portal to approve my request, my leave request is denied. Then what do you do when you already have taken that day off?

That process takes roughly an hour and sucks away all the good vibes in the room. It's not only me who has to waste time and energy to satisfy the bureaucratic processes, oh no, my manager gets involved for approval, bean counters in different off shored locations look at the request, route it, stamp it, validate it, forward it and lose it somewhere. So I estimate that following the process of requesting the day off costs my organisation at least \$750. I can also just take the day off and don't follow the process. Either way I will take the day off. Hmmm... . what did we recently get brainwashed about?

Save costs

Think out of the box

Challenge bureaucracy

Avoid lengthy procedures

Work smarter

Hey, I can tick all the boxes above by just taking that day off and forgetting about all those procedures, forms and timewasting... ..

The one where we benefit from bureaucracy

I received a call from Scott Patterson, the slick salesperson from vendor OverPricedContent Inc. As always he tried to schmooze me by pretending to know me very well and being a "friend". That always irks me, as he would be the last person I can imagine to do fun things with that I do with friends, like guessing Dewey codes, discussing library 2.0 and bashing Google. After not getting anywhere with his small talk, he told me he had been enjoying "interesting" discussions with one of our leading scientists, Adam N. Douglas about a global subscription to OverPricedContent Inc.'s flagship database "HapHazard-Bag-Of-Content-With-Flashy-Features".

Ok, now all alarm bells go off...

End users and sales people should never ever be allowed to talk together. In this case particularly, Adam N. Douglas may be a top-notch scientist, but he has no clue about databases, quality information or our limited library budget.

Scott Patterson is overly excited: "Mr. Douglas said that after the free trial he was very interested in our database, and that he would arrange for you to handle the global license! So, shall I pop over to your office say tomorrow to discuss the size of my bonus... eh.. sorry, the details for a global contract?"

With some effort I manage to get rid of Scott Patterson, as I first want to deal with my distinguished end user. Since 1996 strangling of end users has been prohibited unfortunately and I have been told not to whack l-users (library users) with rubber stamps anymore. I pop over to the research lab and find Adam N. Douglas behind his desk, almost hidden behind printouts, empty coffee cups, dusty binders and lots of broken pencils. He looks up, flinches, remembers he has not got his glasses on, looks for his glasses, puts them on upside down, looks bewildered, realizes his mistake, puts on his glasses on correctly, realizes it is me and smiles: "Oh hello librarian, am I overdue again with my books?"

"Adam, of course you are, but that is not the reason why I am here. You have been talking to a sales person called Scott Patterson?"

"Yes, what a very interesting fellow. He has a wonderful database you know. I tried it and as it has all my articles in it, so that database must be really good. Also, you could change the font size and background color - very handy.

Also, mr. Patterson was very interested in hearing my feedback as well known scientist, and he asked me to be on their advisory board that meets at exotic locations annually. I highly recommend you set up a global deal, mr. Patterson would work that out with you."

"Adam, do you know that over half of the content in mr. Patterson's overpriced database is already available via databases I licensed for you? And why didn't you bring me into the discussions?"

"Mr. Patterson said he already had spoken to you, and that you would be ok with my evaluation - so you think that database is not good value for money... ? Do you think it is a bad thing that I confirmed to Mr. Patterson in an e-mail that Hades Corp. would sign a global contract pending some small details?"

NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO.

This calls for action, as this could get really messy. Luckily I know just what to do: "if you cannot beat them, wear them out". So I quickly head over to my good friend Xander de Beaufort in the contracting and procurement department. Xander by day is a supply chain engineer, using his creative talents, knowledge of contract details and skills in manipulating internal processes. At night and in the weekends he is a forest ranger, driving his Landrover through the woods to help the animals and chase vandals who do not respect Mother Nature. I explain the situation to Xander and he suggests that we employ our bureaucracy tactic to wear the vendor out: "we may not be top quartile in cost management or performance, but we are second to none in bureaucracy!"

Xander will send mr. Patterson a nice e-mail, explaining to him the simple, 12-step program to reach that contract. We'll start with a requirements and opportunity statement review, followed by a portfolio match and market scan based on industry specific benchmarks, leading to either identification of levers in the supply market or the assessment of new suppliers, which surely will bring up a 3 month tender process, resulting in a lengthy tender board meeting to determine the short list. Nearly there, we move on to discussion about price strategies, risk reward models and detailed review of the proposed contracts with the sharks from legal, tax, insurance and intellectual property involved. The surviving lucky vendor, who still wants to deal with us, then has the last hurdle to clear which is to get the right signatures of Hades Corp. top managers. Due to the ongoing re-organizations and managers fear of committing to costs, plus the fact that this process of getting the signatures is handled by our off shored financial services group who cannot

ambush the senior managers in hallways or meeting rooms, chances are slim of this deal ever happening.

The one where we plan a budget meeting

Every year the ritual of preparing next years budget starts in March. I have barely had the time to spend this years budget, and then I have to prepare for next years budget. It is a familiar ritual between my manager and me: he wants a lower budget, I want more budget. Hence I ask for twice the money I really need, he then dissects the budget and challenges every line item, planning to reduce my budget to almost zero. We go back and forth, until I get half of the budget I requested, which is precisely what I need and my manager has the satisfaction of being a cost focused manager who cut away half of the requested budget.

However, like all things that work well, this had to be changed. Our über finance lords now want to get involved in all the details of budget planning, right down to the paperclip level.

I am now placed at the challenge to get my budget plans approved by my manager and the finance manager for overhead functions. To make things a bit more exciting, both are in different locations, different timezones and they have overloaded calendars.

My mission, which I was forced to accept: get both managers into the same teleconference to get agreement on my budget plan for next year. Let me explain to you the process of getting that meeting organised:

- I e-mail the finance manager requesting a brief phone call to explain the purpose of the meeting and share background information before I plan the budget meeting

- The e-mail is refused as "the recipients e-mail box is full"

- I call the finance manager and leave a message in his voicemail box.

- I wait for three days without any response.

- I try to call once again and the finance managers' voicemail asks me to contact him via his new secretary as he is overloaded with meetings requests and e-mails following the new company procedures.

- After numerous attempts, I get through to the finance managers' secretary and we set a date and time for the conference call a week later.

- I confirm the time and date to my manager, the finance manager and his secretary.

- My manager calls me two hours before the scheduled meeting telling me he cannot attend the meeting, kindly asking me to reschedule.

- Working with the finance managers' secretary, we find out there is not a single opportunity in the next two weeks where both are available in the same time slot (some say this is coincidence, I say it is coordinated sabotage.)

- I finally find a slot that suits everyone and send out the new meeting details: date, time, dial in number and pass-code.

- At the agreed date and time, I eagerly wait for both managers to dial in.

- My manager calls me on my cell phone asking me for the conference pass-code, as he has forgotten that. He dials in and we wait for 10 minutes for the finance manager. We decide to hang up.

- I get an angry e-mail from the finance manager saying he was in the teleconference an hour ago and why weren't we there? I call his secretary and find out the finance manager is on a business trip to another region in another timezone, hence he mixed up the time for the meeting.

Just when I am ready to pull my hair out and scream out in frustration I see the urgent e-mail coming in from our CEO: "In order to respond to the falling share price, our disgruntled shareholders and my desire to be a true leader - I announce a complete reorganisation of Hades Inc. More details will be announced soon, but for now do not start new projects, hire new staff or plan next years budget. There will of course be layoffs, but I trust all of you will 'keep your eye on the ball' and make sure your meet your targets this year while you worry about your job."

Mmmm... . saved by the bell?

The one where we take a look behind the scenes

As all of you know, I have many special system privileges and wide access to all information within Hades Corp. Yesterday I noticed that many meetings are now recorded for audit purposes, so I can be a "fly on the wall" in many interesting meetings.

I would like to give you an exclusive, behind the scenes look of the meeting where the new out of pocket expense claim management system was discussed.

Project manager (PM): People, welcome to the kick off meeting of project "cost-busters". As you know, we are on a relentless drive to drive down costs in our beloved company. Our project will focus on the out-of-pocket expense claim system. Right now that is too easy for the end users, basically they just fill out a simple form, sign in, attach the receipts and within a week the company reimburses them.

Compared to industry benchmarks, that is JUST NOT ACCEPTABLE!

Think of our motto "CARE for our users": Confuse, Annoy, Rile and Enrage the users. If we "care" enough, people will stop submitting out of pocket expenses and we save many pennies.

So, guys, tell me, what will the new system look like?

User interface design (UI): you will be pleased to learn that we have gone out of our way to annoy the user with the interface. We have at least twice the number of buttons and options than needed, the important icons are tiny and just below the viewable screen area.

Our ground rule was: "the interface should hurt the user". Hence, the screen colors are puke, drab and washed-out. Also, the order of menu items and buttons will change at least randomly every week. To top it off, the expense claim form has to be filled out in 5 minutes otherwise the form is reset.

Process engineer (PE): we have also looked at best practices. The new expense claim process is unrivalled in the industry. If you look at the process drawing hand out, you will see we have a multi-step process with many steps being dead ends. So if the user goes wrong in one step, they have to go back to the beginning. Just to make sure we reach optimal frustration, we only explain half of the process in the brochure and on-line training.

Once a claim has been entered, we will automatically generate a number of useless status updates via e-mail and text messages, preferably to users personal phones.

Customer disregard centre (CDC): I am pleased to announce that the new expense claim system will be fully supported by our off shored, underpaid and overworked service centre. End users will only be able to communicate with the service center by filling out another form! In return they will get a ticket number and a promise that a service "agent" will contact them in 48 hours. Of course, that excludes UK bank holidays, all major religious holidays and officially recognized US holidays.

The big secret is that every request form is ignored first. If it is really important, the end user will be motivated enough to fill out another form. Then we assign the service request to either the clueless intern who hasn't got a clue or to the disgruntled service agent who has just given up smoking. In either case they will send a standard e-mail back to the end user, suggesting they look at the frequently asked questions or follow the online training.

User acceptance testing (UAT): it should be no problem getting approval from the end users. We have found a group of end users that are willing to give their approval if we buy them lunch and give them a free web cam. And no, it's not bribery - we think of it as encouraging end user buy in with incentives.

So knowing all of the above about the new expense claim system, I decide it's better to avoid using it. I will just add up all out of pocket expenses over the year, and then send myself invoices from my own company (obnoxious librarian inc.) at the end of the year. Just make sure the invoices are below the threshold that I can authorize myself, and I have saved myself a lot of frustration and time..

The one where we take ethics, compliancy and diversity training

It used to be that once every year, the ethics, compliance and diversity manager would gather all of us in a meeting room for 10 minutes to give us a reminder: "Folks, you are all adults and professionals. Behave well, act as adults and don't do anything that would make me ashamed of you. If you have questions, call me. Any questions?"

But the ethics, compliance and diversity manager retired last year and of course HR saw their chance to collect a huge budget to build an online ethics, compliance and diversity learning website. All staff now has to undergo the online, 2 hour mandatory training with a multiple choice test on the end.

The course is developed to "engage" us in an "interactive simulation" of the appropriate behaviour. Well, if you ask me - the course is an insult to all staff as it clearly indicates how HR thinks of us...

A few examples:

First of all, all videos and images during the presentation are politically correct and reflect no real office life at all. So in every video and picture there is gender and racial diversity: at least one female, one Asian, one African American and one Caucasian staff member. Furthermore, it is required to show standard images of colleagues standing around a computer with one of them pointing to the screen and the others look very interested.

What highly annoys me is that the "interactive simulations" use dramatic story lines which could be taken from made-for-TV drama's:

"During this course you will follow the story of Joe Schmo, engineer at ACME Inc. His lack of interest in company ethics and conflict of interest resulted in DOOM for him, his family and all future generations of Schmos! Don't be like Joe and pay attention during the course!

[Joe is invited to meet the company VP]

Joe: Hi Mike, good to see you - what do you want to talk about?

Mike: Joe, I am very disappointed in you. We saw you as an honest, hardworking engineer who knew what it takes to raise in the ranks. You worked late, took all the shitty jobs I gave you, laughed at all my stupid jokes... but you violated our holy policy on accepting gifts.

Joe: Mike... I... I don't understand... .

Mike: Joe, you know how I share your passion for crushing the competition and squeezing every penny out of our vendors. I don't mind strong arming the competition or doing some creative bribing to get a deal. But as I have always said: "don't get caught"!

Your secretary reported to me that you have received and accepted two tickets to an amateur performance of "A chorus line" from vendor X, worth 51 dollars! That is a violation of our rules. I see no other way than to fire you!

Let's now go back in time to understand what Joe did wrong and what he should have done... "

Or an example from the diversity & inclusiveness course:

"This course will explain how to behave in an ultra-political correct manner. We begin this course with the story of John Schmuck, who meets his new colleague from France. First we will explain how NOT to behave and then the proper way.

WRONG:

John: Oh hello there, you must be the hot new transfer from Paris! Oh la la! I am John, the office Don Juan!

Louise: Hi John, it is nice to meet you. I look forward to working with you on project X.

John: Louise, Louise, you will be working under me and that will be a mutual pleasure!

Louise: Pardon me!

John: Well, Louise, I also love literature. Perhaps you and I can discuss "Casanova" over candlelight dinner tonight at my place?"

RIGHT:

John: Hello miss Boursain. My name is John Schmuck.

Louise: Nice to meet you mr. Schmuck.

John: Do call me John. I look forward to working with you in a professional, gender neutral behaviour without any jokes, fun or other silly stuff that our corporate ethics clearly forbid."

Disclaimer: this post and all others are the product of the authors' imagination and any resemblance to real situations is purely bad luck. This article does not reflect the thoughts or opinions of either myself, my company, my friends, or my Elvis doll. Do not read while operating heavy machinery. Contact your congress man for instructions.

The one where we don't attend the regional library conference

Ah, how good it is to be a librarian – right now I am reading the Artemis Fowl fantasy series while sitting at the library desk. To hide what I am reading, I have wrapped the book in a fake cover with “Library 2.0 – Hype or reality?” on it. On every page I frown, pretend to scribble something on the page or highlight a paragraph. This way nobody notices I am actually reading for fun, and librarians are supposed to read of course. Anyway, I was supposed to network and have fun at the annual regional library conference, but the central training approval team denied my request.

Every year I have to fill out a proposal to attend the regional library conference and submit that to the central training approval team (a bunch of HR control freaks). When I just joined the company, I innocently asked permission to attend a national library conference like ALA or SLA. In those days I would actually go over to a person in the office to request permission, so I had the opportunity to see them snicker at my request. “A national library conference? Gee – three whole days? What do you talk about? Books? Hahaha. Forget it”.

Nowadays the process has improved as everything goes through web forms, so I am spared the in-the-face humiliation. I was however allowed to attend the regional library conference every year, as long as I drove back and forth every day since the company would not fund lodging.

This year the central training approval team was thrilled with the global credit crisis – another reason to deny more outside training! Another argument to turn down training requests and save money! They actually suggested to that instead of attending the conference, I would buy the conference proceedings and “acquire the learnings” that way.

Oh come on. Conferences to me are 25% about the presentations, 10% about seeing the latest and greatest from the vendors, 15% about being away from the office and 50% about networking. Conference proceedings capture less than 5% of the conference value, as usually they are just prints of the slides which are meaningless without the actual talk.

And while I am on the topic of presentations at library conferences, I think we should do a greatest hits conference. I see quite a lot of the same presentations every year, usually with a different template or title, but the essence stays the same. Also, there are some classics out there

that I would love to hear again – some have reached cult level in library-land.

So why don't we do a "Library conference – the best of 1980 – 2010" next year?

Why cataloguing is still relevant in an online world (1993)

Fighting the "shushing" and bun stereotype (1985)

Why we are so much better than AltaVista (1996)

Library 2.0: more hype and fluff to make us seem hip (2005)

This whole web thing is just a hype and will never go anywhere (1994)

End user tagging: the beginning of chaos (2003)

Taxonomies – the next big thing to save our profession (2002)

CompuServe - the primary information network (1985)

Dialog command line searching – obscure tips and powerful tricks (1981)

As networking is for many attendees the most important aspect to a conference, I would have breaks every hour, plan long lunch breaks and bars everywhere to hobnob.



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