



Stay the Course

My father once told me that a sure way to know you're doing something valuable is that you will have many detractors and will be criticized loudly. Time and time again, he's been proved right.

For example, many years ago in these pages, I suggested that manually installing a certain operating system with its many continuous minutes of human interaction was a bad idea. I asked, isn't disk duplication a better idea, saving hundreds of technician hours? Not only was I spanked by a certain Monstrous Software company, but I also received angry letters from administrators schooled in that company's "correct" methods, and our editors received lots of mail about what a crank I was.

The market eventually embraced disk duplication as a sound method of hard drive configuration. It wasn't my idea, but I thought it was a good one and worthy of discussion. True to my father's theorem, the fact that the idea raised so many hackles among those comfortable with the status quo proved its worth.

Words of Encouragement

I've recalled my pop's advice throughout my professional career, and at no time have I needed it more than when I've changed jobs. Although I haven't stepped into the perfect IT organization yet, each new boss has appreciated my fresh perspective. But predictably, there were always those who preferred I didn't rock the boat. Any time you step into a new role, you need encouragement to stave off those detractors and stay the course, whether you're implementing IT policy or technology. For example, if you've been hired as the new mail administrator because of your fly abilities with blacklisting and content filtering, you're sure to get major pushback.

Since I've recently accepted a new position, I decided to write myself a note of encouragement so I'll have it to refer to whenever the criticism gets too loud, and, as my pop did, I pass it on to you.

One of my favorite scenes in *The Matrix* is when

Agent Smith is holding Neo down on the subway tracks. You can hear the train roaring toward them, and Smith says, "Hear that, Mr. Anderson? That is the sound of inevitability. That is the sound of your death." Faced with an unacceptable outcome, Neo doesn't disappoint: He manages to pull some superpowered martial arts moves on Smith and do what he's destined to do—fight to change the status quo.

Keep Your Head

Since most of us lack superpowers, I offer this alternative when co-workers suggest that the status quo is "inevitable": Smile, keep your technical skills sharp (read, read, read, and keep playing in the lab), don't play politics, and go do what you were hired to do—improve security, implement policy, fix routers, hack the Matrix, whatever. And try to avoid the Matrix's sense of self-importance; admitting to mistakes and seeking out the assistance of colleagues will ultimately contribute to your success.

Perhaps that's what's most important: If you keep your head and enlist others to your cause, you'll be able to do what needs to be done. OK, so maybe your group policies are too restrictive or your spam policies are eating legit mail. Figure out what's broken, ask others if they want to be part of the solution (rather than the problem), fix it, and move on to the next thing.

If you have a valid business reason for what you're doing, don't quit. And even as you gather detractors, you'll have the strength to challenge them and bring about change, as Neo did: "You're afraid of change. ... I'm going to show them ... a world where anything is possible. Where we go from there is a choice I leave to you." **NWC**



Keep your technical skills sharp, don't play politics, and go do what you were hired to do.



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