

# Memoirs of a Self-Loathing IT Professional

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## Prima Donna

It seemed like a normal day when I woke up but I knew something was off when I arrived at my office and Todd was sitting inside waiting for me. Todd was highly reserved and not overly social so it was unusual to be graced by his presence.

“Good morning Todd, to what do I owe the pleasure?” I asked.

“Dean resigned,” Todd said matter-of-factly.

“Really?” I asked surprised. “I guess Dean wearing the suit lately was really more than *dressing for success?*”

“Obviously, but this means we’re going to get to support his apps and finish his project,” Todd said as he watched me put away my coat and backpack. “I reviewed some of his code last year; he’s a brute force kind-of guy, not too pretty.”

“Do you know where he is going?” I asked as I sat down in front of my computer and logged in.

“He’s been talking about making mobile apps for a while, something pointless like an app that lets you know where your friends are,” he said. “But I overheard him on the phone with Novia Energy. He’s going there to be a solutions architect.”

“Cool,” I said.

I wasn't too sure about making mobile apps – it struck me that the wave of opportunity was over. Technology success stories come in waves. Sometimes early adopters are rewarded handsomely – and most other times they fall into total obscurity. I had bet on the wrong horses a few times and though I learned a lot I also became wary of new tech. One of my favorite authors wrote that throwing new tech into a project was a guaranteed fail. System designers should stick with safe, secure and trusted tools – otherwise you battle the instability of newness without experts to enlist. But we developers always like to play with new toys and they made our résumés look better.

I tried to log in to my email but the server was down. “Your email working?” I asked Todd.

“It was but a summer student managed to take out the server,” Todd replied. “That’s one of the reasons I’m here. I can’t do much on my current project because I need the email servers and the messaging team has locked them all up.”

“Wow, what happened?” I asked.

Todd settled back a bit in the chair to tell the story. “Well this girl sent a fund raising request to one of the corporate address lists by mistake yesterday. This address list contained most of the people in the company. So then everyone started replying to all saying *don't contact me*, but they carbon-copied her boss, their boss, and now everyone in the company is cc'ing everyone else saying *stop replying-to-all* and whatnot. This poor girl started an exponential, internal, accidental, denial-of-service attack. The email guys can't delete the messages fast enough and every time they bring the system back up it reignites like a forest fire in a drought.”

“I saw that and ignored it. But that’s a great start to a career!” I chuckled. “Does she still work here?”

“I don't know, but if I were her, I'd be hiding,” Todd responded. He paused and had a somewhat serious look on his face. “We need to coordinate the fair dissemination of Dean's office supplies.”

“That’s sudden,” I said with a frown, “Shouldn’t we wait two weeks for him to vacate?” I thought Todd was going to talk about how to split up Dean’s work.

“Anne doesn’t do that,” Todd informed me. “She will pay him out his two weeks.”

“Doesn’t he need to transfer knowledge as per policy?” I asked curiously. “I mean if we’re going to support his stuff, we should know more about what he is doing.”

Todd smiled ominously. Just then Jeff popped his head in the door. “Hey guys, I just got off the phone with Anne and she wants to have a quick meeting with us. She said it’s important.”

“There we go,” I said as we got up and followed Jeff into the conference room. I was sure this meeting was going to be about Dean. The entire team was there, including Dean, who was wearing his old-school jeans and T-shirt. Alan surprisingly was wearing a tie. He was beaming, grinning ear-to-ear.

“Good morning gentleman, I have a few quick announcements to make. First if any of your clients ask you about the email service, just tell them that IT is working to fix the problem as soon as possible. Next, Alan will be leaving us because he’s accepted the position of group lead for our new project management office. Congratulations to Alan and thanks for all your hard work! We have a couple other departures so I’ll be meeting with you all individually about rearranging the workload. We’ll also have a new face next week.” And then Anne’s demeanor changed to be more solemn.

“And I have an administrative issue to discuss. I had a meeting with HR yesterday where it was brought to my attention that our HR policy reserves offices with windows for employees. They’ve scheduled office moves for many of you to the inside offices. I just wanted to warn you. It’s nothing you guys have done and it’s not another reorg. HR told me to tell you *it’s a correction*. So don’t be surprised when email arrives in your inbox from office services with the scheduled move dates and times.”

“Isn’t it HR’s purpose to make us feel more comfortable and so more productive?” asked Todd.

“Have you ever met anyone from HR?” Jeff asked Todd before Anne could respond.

Dean started in, almost laughing, “Uh, doesn’t it cost like \$10,000 to do a move, even from floor to floor or across the hall. That’s like \$60k of excellent value.”

“This all doesn’t matter,” Anne responded. “Besides, we’re lucky we’re not moving into the new building. HR is following a new model there where it’s all cubicles for IT. Corporate IT services is presently staying close to their clients.”

“I’m getting a window,” Alan stated abruptly. “I’m an employee and I didn’t have a window and I’m entitled to a window.”

There was an awkward silence in the room. I quickly tried to read all the faces present to see if I was the only one in *what-the-hell* mode. Five of the six contractors looked like they shared my feelings. The one that didn’t was Dean, in fact he was grinning maniacally. *You bastard*, I thought, *did you know or are you just happy to get out?* Anne looked relaxed, and Alan continued to have a smug look of satisfaction on his face.

“If there is nothing else the meeting is over,” Anne said. As we got up Anne added a quick last minute note. “I almost forgot. This Friday we’re having a going away lunch for Alan. I hope to see you all there.”

I followed “the dudes” to their corner office. I called them “the dudes” because whenever I visited them they were always together and very informal. Dean almost jumped into his chair and spun around. He seemed very happy, almost giddy, and it was annoying to me.

“I hear you’re leaving,” I said to Dean. “Do you know something we don’t?”

“No bro, not about the PMO initiative, not about the office arrangements. It’s just coincidence I’m moving on,” he said.

“You seem to know something,” Jeff added.

“Well,” Dean started, “I have a theory about Alan being pissed off and complaining to HR that *he* didn’t have a window and *we* did.”

“You have no evidence,” Todd said quietly. “It could have been anyone.”

*Something doesn’t seem right*, I thought. “This is not classy. Why have a going away lunch for Alan and not for you? I mean – he’s not even leaving. We didn’t have a lunch for Ted either.”

“Well Ted was a dick, and really it’s because Anne can’t expense lunches for contractors bro,” Dean replied. He rubbed his stubbly chin. “I also know Anne interviewed a guy to replace me.”

“That’s quick. Didn’t you resign today?” I asked.

“My wife Kim is a recruiter and one of her clients is Banana Energy,” Dean said. “She told me she screened a guy for Anne’s group and it was *interesting*. I figure he’ll take over my shit – but he’s not why I’m leaving either. Anne wasn’t getting rid of me.”

“Interesting?” Todd repeated intrigued.

“Well, Kim asked him the usual psych questions and he had some interesting responses like, *How do you work in a team environment?* And he said, *I like to be a lone wolf*. Or, *What would you do if you had a disagreement with your boss?* And he said, *I’d get angry*. But I figure Anne knows him from somewhere so she proceeded with onboarding anyway,” Dean explained.

“Hey email is back!” Jeff exclaimed.

I was feeling a bit anxious about getting back to work but I wanted to keep talking with the dudes via messaging, just in case email went back down. Banana didn’t approve of instant messaging so I had an idea to use old-school Microsoft network messaging. “Hey do you guys know if the microsoft messaging service is enabled?”

“By default no,” Todd said, “but it’s not like the desktop guys can get rid of it. It’s a standard part of Windows.”

“Cool,” I said, “Turn it on and we can send each other messages.” I got the okay from the dudes and I went back to my office. To this day I do not know why I couldn’t use a phone.

Later that afternoon I got a message on my computer from Dean. It was preceded by an annoying beep and a pop-up window. *Message from Computer01435: I just met with Anne and I’m clearing out. Keep in touch bro.*

It had been a while since I used the network message command. I typed, *net send /banana deano “Come to my office before you go.”* Then I heard a chorus of annoying beeps echoing up and down the hall. Even though I was pretty far from the corner office I heard a burst of laughter. *Oh – my – god*, I thought as I quickly walked down the hall. On the way I noticed a few people sitting at their desks with puzzled looks.

When I got to the corner the dudes were still laughing. On Todd’s screen I could see a pop-up window that read, *Message from Computer01541: deano come to my office before you go.*

“Forget a colon?” Jeff asked.

“It’s domain, colon, user – no space,” Todd said.

“I just sent this to everyone in the company, didn’t I?” I asked defeated.

“Yep, you spammed everyone online,” Dean chuckled. “Let me know how many Deans show up.”

My face turned red and I asked Todd angrily, “You said it was off by default?”

“It’s supposed to be,” Todd said shaking his head. “I guess the desktop guys changed the default to off recently and it wasn’t a retroactive desktop update. So it would be more correct to say you sent a message to anyone who wasn’t recently provisioned with a computer.”

I couldn’t take it. I told Dean it would be great to work with him again, shook his hand and I slunk home. I half expected a phone call from Anne telling me I was fired. I thought a bit

about the poor summer student who had a bigger blunder than I. She cost the company thousands, if not tens-of-thousands, of dollars. Me? I just confused a few hundred people who would have no idea who *deano* was. Would people call the help desk? I wondered if Aubrey Wilson CEO saw my message. *How easy it is to make very public mistakes?* I thought. *What a stupid input format.* It suffices to say I didn't sleep well that night.

The next day when I arrived at my desk there was no missed phone call nor meeting booked between myself and Anne to discuss my imminent dismissal. *Did anyone notice?* I thought. *Maybe a lot of people weren't at their desks – it was late in the day.* I strolled down to the corner office, trying to appear inconspicuous. Jeff and Todd were there at Dean's desk. It looked like Dean had just left everything behind, as it was, disorganized.

“What's up?” I asked.

“Just rummaging for supplies,” Jeff replied.

Todd had a disgusted look on his face. He was looking underneath the desk and brought up a clear sports bottle filled with an off, yellow fluid. “I do not want to guess what this is,” he said.

“Nah, it couldn't be,” Jeff said, though he too now had a sickened, puzzled look about him.

I smiled and said, “Dibs on the stapler.”