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DBA Proverbs

Over the years I have collected quotes, sayings, and proverbs that have some applicability to database administration. You'd be surprised how many apply in some way to DBAs. With this in mind, I thought it might be fun to share some of them with you today.

Unfortunately I do now know who originally uttered my favorite quote, which is: "The best thing about standards is that there are so many to choose from." But I bet everyone reading can relate to it! And not just technical standards, but industry standards and regulatory standards, too. It would be one thing if there were one standard that applied to any situation, but usually there are at least two or three, which can make complying with standards a difficult thing, don't you think?

Another great quote come from the recently disgraced former New York state attorney general, Eliot Spitzer. He said: "Never write when you can talk. Never talk when you can nod. And never put anything in an e-mail." Those are words to live by for a DBA!

And who can argue with Jan L. A. van de Snepscheut, a world renowned computer scientist, who said "In theory, there's no difference between theory and practice. In practice, however, this is seldom true."

Thomas Jefferson, one of our founding fathers, gave us these words to live by: "The possession of facts is knowledge; the use of them is wisdom." But most DBAs sometimes will wonder whether the people around them little about either facts or wisdom. And Bernard Mannes Baruch adds to this line of thinking by stating: "Every man has a right to his opinion, but no man has a right to be wrong in his facts."

The ancient Chinese philosopher Confucius could have been a good DBA, too. He tells us that "To study and not think is a waste. To think and not study is dangerous." A good DBA will study and think!

And the next time you are looking at performance statistics and trying to optimize your systems, take a moment to think about the greatest thinker of the 20th Century, Albert Einstein, who tells us this: "Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted." With that in mind, how are you going to analyze that performance data and make sense out of it?

Even folk singers can impart gems of wisdom to the willing listener. Pete Seeger (he wrote "If I Had a Hammer" and "Where Have All the Flowers Gone," among others) shares this wisdom with us: "Education is what you get when you read the fine print; Experience is what you get when you don't." Now be honest, how many of you have gained this type of experience lately? "Experience is the hardest kind of teacher. It gives you the test first and the lesson afterwards." I don't know who said that, but it sure is true.

The next time you are charged with designing a new database, first give a shout out to the bard, William Shakespeare, who wrote "See first that the design is wise and just; that ascertained, pursue it resolutely." I wonder if Shakespeare used ERwin?

Admiral Grace Hopper, the originator of COBOL, is famous for saying "Go ahead and do it, it is easier to apologize than to get permission." But make sure you know what you are doing before you apply this one! After all, if your actions cause an outage you can apologize all you want, but you may not be forgiven! That is to say, you should take the words of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe to heart: "There is nothing worse than aggressive stupidity."

Is there a DBA "out there" who cannot relate to the words of psychiatrist Theodore Rubin, who said "The problem is not that there are problems. The problem is expecting otherwise and thinking that having problems is a problem." If you don't agree with Rubin, you might have a problem!

Sir Winston Churchill tells us that "To improve is to change; to be perfect is to change often." But a good DBA will make sure he uses a tool to make database changes, or problems will arise.

I could go on and on with these DBA proverbs, but there is only so much space for this column. So let's close with one from John Foster Dulles that every DBA should be able to relate to: "The measure of success is not whether you have a tough problem to deal with, but whether or not it is the same problem you had last year."

Here's hoping that your new year is full of brand new problems!

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