Technology Corner

"Did Obsolete Technology Make Me a Better Lawyer?"

By Eddie Stephens, Esq., West Palm Beach, Florida

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I am a computer techie…. I guess, that's nicer than calling myself a geek, but it is very accurate and all the same.

How did I end up this way? I can pinpoint the moment and can tell you it was all a big accident.

In 1980, I was all set to attend the "Ron Frasier Baseball Summer Camp". Ron Frasier was the coach of the Great Miami Hurricanes Baseball team. During the summer, he offered a camp for kids taught by college players wanting to make a few bucks during the summer working as camp counselors. This was the summer I was going to boost my skills and develop a more confident swing.

As the fates would have it, two weeks before camp was to begin, I had an accident which put me in crutches for 8 weeks and left my mom scrambling to find something for me to do. Being an accident prone kid, I was playing in some garbage and stepped on a metal stake that went through my shoe and right through my foot. Baseball camp wasn't in the cards.

It was 1980 and the only camp that could accommodate a 10-year-old kid on crutches was computer camp. At this time in my life, we didn't have the internet or email. In fact, we didn't even have computers. We had pong.

Pong was a two-dimensional table tennis game that was released in a home version in 1975. Computers were massive machines that took up rooms of space and held data on large punch cards and magnetic tape. The capabilities of super computers of the 1980's are now dwarfed by the smart phones your children currently take to school, but at the time they were mysterious and no one really knew how they worked.

So, off to computer camp I went. We learned a programming language called "basic" on Apple II computers. This was the first affordable "personal computer" released to the public. Not only did I learn how to play games on these computers, they taught me the logic and coding capabilities to create games, and other programs, on my own. This was well before most adults could competently use a computer for any task, other than playing pong.

My technological capabilities the following year were discovered when I "hacked" into the main computer at my elementary school when I was left in the office on an occasion my mother was picking me up early from school. Renaming a root directory on the unattended computer could hardly be described as hacking. My mom made a deal with the principal that they would not suspend me if I could teach them what I did to their computers.

Ever since, I have had a fascination with computers and have tried to stay up to date with the technology as I get older. In college, I took classes in Pascal, Cobol, HTML and dBase. This knowledge is as obsolete as these programming skills because of the speed with which technology has evolved.

However, this exercise was extremely beneficial to me becoming a better lawyer. Nothing prepares you for logical thinking (i.e. thinking like a lawyer) than the brutal rules of old school coding. I consider this period of time crucial in causing me to develop the critical thinking skills I now employ on a daily basis. Any skill set must be developed. The hours spent coding represent how I honed my thought process. Sure it was brutal, but time spent in the salt mines is just another example of paying some dues to excel at your profession.

So, with these personal experiences, I offer the few tidbits of wisdom I have on the topic. Like everything in life, incorporate the ideas that resonate with you personally and disregard the rest:

1) Don't hold on to anything too tightly. I remember the great struggle of 1998 to switch our paralegals from WP 5.1 to a Windows environment (WYSIWYG). There will always be a better way to do things.

2) Don't be the first person to get the newest technology. It always takes a few versions to get the bugs out. Don't be that guy waiting in line at the apple store the day a new product is released. You know who you are.

3) Don't post anything you wouldn't want a judge, disciplinary committee, potential employer, your children,

etc… to see. Information is a commodity and is being curated by others for profit. Just because you have deleted a Facebook post does not mean it's gone. While everybody may have an opinion, not everyone should be posting that opinion to social media.

4) Check your email at designated times in the day. If you check every time you get an alert, it reduces your productivity.

5) Treat email correspondence as you would a formal letter. Have it proofread if necessary. Email has made it very easy to respond to communications quickly. Sometimes you shouldn't.

6) Watch where you are walking! You might miss the opportunity to become a professional ball player and settle for being a critical thinker.

Eddie Stephens is a partner in Ward Damon located in West Palm Beach, FL. Mr. Stephens was admitted to the *Florida Bar in 1997 and is Board Certified in Family and Marital Law. After starting his career as an attorney for the Palm Beach County Property Appraiser's Office, Stephens has developed a successful family law practice focused on highly disputed divorces. Through hundreds of trials, Stephens has honed his practice by making straightforward arguments that bring opposing sides closer together in order to find a successful resolution.*

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Maria Gonzalez was recently honored with the 2016 "Honorable Hugh E. Starnes Community Service Award" by the Florida Chapter of The Association of Family and Conciliation Courts (FLAFCC) at the Orlando Conference.

Congratulations to Amy Hamlin, Secretary of the Family Law Section, in completing both a 10K and a half marathon in the recent Food & Wine Half Marathon Weekend.

Congratulations!