

A Super Heroes Guide To Development

Intro

Good morning everyone. Before we begin, I'd just like to say that any really funny parts of this talk are from the wonderful mind of my wife, Rach. She cast her expert eye over my talk, and turned it from mush into steak.

Let's pretend we're playing that American game called Jopardy.

Answers:

- Rippling Muscles
- Huge Breasts
- External Underwear
- Capes

Questions:

- Things that will win you a Karaoke Contest
 - Maybe
- Things that remind you of the singer Meatloaf
 - Mostly
- Things that make you think of Software Development ..

- Not Generally

They are, of course, attributes of Super Heroes. Although they seem worlds apart, Software Developers and Super Heroes actually share a lot in common. Seriously.

Incidentally, here's some images that should make you think of Software Development .. [show the piccies of Bruce + Geoff]

Let's jump right in and take a look at ***A Super Heroes Guide To Development.***

1. Origins

The night is cold. A young man sits alone in a dark room inside a mansion, illumination coming from shards of moonlight through windows high above.

Outwardly he is a prime specimen of mankind. Strong, tall, broad-shouldered. At levels of fitness unknown to all but the most dedicated and abled performers. His mind too is trained beyond that of mortal ken. Intelligence and diligence combined into one.

But blood and chaos hound his steps. His is the pain of loved ones lost to violence. And anger drives him, pushes him, has almost consumed him.

The young man looks for a sign, some kind of symbol. His is a crusade, un-formed and shapeless though it may be at the moment. A crusade of violence against those who would be violent.

A sign.

Of course, most of us have already guessed the individual's identity, and know his story.

A Super Hero was born that night (technically) when a bat flew

through one of the open windows high above. Batman is an iconic hero. Gifted and trained beyond most people's understanding, but with turmoil boiling away under the surface.

There are many Super Heroes.

Batman. Wolverine. The Phantom. Wonder Woman. The Flash. Robin Hood. King Arthur. The Fantastic Four. Elektra. Harry Potter. The Hulk. Tarzan. Spiderman.

They've all got Origin stories. Some are plain for all to see. Some are shrouded in mystery.

The importance of an Origin Story is undeniable.

Your Origin is your background. It's where you came from, what made you the way you are.

When you understand where you come from you can better know where you are going and why. You can understand what inspires you and why.

The challenge from this point is a little off kilter, but then hopefully most of the points are the same.

Get an Origin Story, if you don't already have one. Whether crafted from the bare fabric of reality, or from the hidden depths of your imagination. Have an Origin Story ready to whip out when it's needed. Show it on your website. Send it out in a newsletter. Spread it far on a special podcast. Make it into a song. Write a book.

It might be about your company. It could be about you, the individual. Even for your product.

If you already have origin stories, then get them reviewed. Perhaps they need some embellishment. Dragons are always good value, as are busty warrior women. Or hunky warriors with bare chests hanging off the side of a boat. Why do all Barbara Cartlan novels have that guy on the cover?

Get an Origin Story!

2. Super Powers

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Most Super Heroes have at least one special Ability. Something that helps to set them apart. Give them an edge.

The Flash. He's easy. Speed .. baby, and lots of it.

The Hulk. Super Strength.

Daredevil, Spidey .. they've got agility, plus some kind of "Sense".

Supes can fly. So can Storm.

Xavier's telepathic. As is Jean Grey.

The list goes on. And on.

Do you have a simple grasp of your own abilities?

Some of us might remember Roger Ramjet .. What a wonderful carton. Anyway .. what was his signature power, apart from gross stupidity?

The Proton Energy Pill! It's a simple example of a clear understanding. As a kid, you knew that Roger couldn't defeat the evil boss without swallowing the Proton Energy Pill first. It gave him 20 seconds of unrivalled power.

Maybe you can understand cryptology and security better than anyone else. Perhaps it's your ability to stubbornly refuse to give up. Or that you can see to the heart of the matter at hand, if it be technical, or in terms of business. Maybe you can be true to a single vision. You might be able to juggle multiple jobs.

There are lots of skills and abilities in the world of Development.

Look at Bill Gates. Maybe we could code better than him. Or even envisage an OS that took Windows to the cleaners. But it seems to me that he played to his strengths. Sure, a lot of folk got burned in the process, but Bill Gates knew his

abilities. He took hold of opportunity, having a vision. Some people probably thought he was crazy. But even including Google, Bill Gates has yet to be rivaled in terms of his singular success.

Do we dream of mediocrity? Lameness? A half-assed program?

No. We want awesomeness in a bottle. We want to become better and better at whatever it is we do.

And the other side is just as important.

Superman was a hero with many cool powers. But as we all know, Kryptonite made him as weak as a baby. It made him less than a super hero. It was his one weakness.

Know your Kryptonite!

Listing weaknesses wouldn't be a smart thing to do, since noone likes negativity.

So here goes ..

Too quick to dismiss another's opinion, even if it's wrong
Too worried about what people think of you
You can't let that kind of character assassination go without a fight
You assassinate people's characters without hesitation
Too easily fired up, on the forums, newsgroups, emails .. or even on your blog (heh heh)

But you know .. the biggest weakness in Software Development (really, none of the previous items matter in the light of this) is that we lack passion. We are too scared to jump in and learn new things.

Two years ago I had less than a sheep's dropping idea about real desktop development. I had bashed together some stuff myself .. but it was out of pure imagination rather than knowledge.

Now, I can truly say I've worked on some kicking applications.

And I know that in another year my current code now will scare the willies out of me. But that's cool, really. I like that I'm getting better all the time, and I like that I can

continue to learn.

It's just plain wisdom that when you come to a better understanding of yourself, you can grow. You can increase your powers, enhance your abilities, and even get new abilities .. eliminating weaknesses.

Know your Proton Energy Pill! And know your Kryptonite!

Exercise your huge biceps, your fab abs, make sure your cape gets flight time.

When you know your Super Powers, show them to the world. Get them out there. It's not enough to simply have them. You have to make them known. Put the ladies on display. As Ron Burgundy says in Anchorman, Give people two tickets to the gun show.

3. The Super League Of Extraordinary Heroes

Super Heroes are often seen working together. Teams. This is mostly because writers dream up situations which require more than the skills of an individual.

Remember Voltron? Either the Car or the Lion one. Battle Of The Planets? Each segment had a specific skillset that could be used in a particular situation.

A better, and clearer, explanation is that of the human body.

My foot can't spoon me some icecream. My hand can't headbutt the other prop as the scrum packs in. My head doesn't do so well kicking down a door. Although I guess you can try.

Each segment of the body has it's own unique talents, and each segment cannot be at it's best without the other parts.

We are generally pretty good at pointing out faults in other people.

eg. when someone is obnoxious, or when someone has a chip on their shoulder, or when they are easily riled

Harder to narrow down are the gifts and talents in those same people.

When we do, and when we can bind ourselves together, well then most definitely what we can produce is nothing short of amazing.

Look at successful teams that we know about.

There's Google, that mighty juggernaut of development. There's Blizzard, the game development company behind Diablo, Warcraft, Starcraft. There's the Australian Rugby team of yester-year, and the Kiwis and Springboks (ahem) of the now :).

Teams can do far more than an individual. One person has limits. A group of one person's has limits, but they have been expanded far beyond the single radius.

And forming a team isn't just about getting a bunch of coders to work together.

As a team, each understanding their strengths, what can be achieved is greater than one person on their own.

What is the essence of this point?

Simply, it's that building relationships will grow us into something amazing. More than we could ever be on our own.

Friends often start companies/projects together. Why? Because they know each other well. They have a good grasp on the abilities of the team, because they have solid relationship.

Learn about the members of the team. How to get on with them. What they like, what they don't like. How they react under pressure, how they deal with crisis. What kind of dreams they have. And what abilities they wield.

Then, when you know this, in the heat of the battle, you'll be able to provide them with the support they need, and vice versa. You can be the buffer for their weaknesses, and you can rely on them to be strong when you are not.

Building a team of Super Heroes will bring strength beyond what you can do on your own. I should rectify that.

Building a team of Super Heroes who are bound together through cords stronger than mere acquaintance will bring you true power. A good team will help one another grow powers, address weaknesses .. they will .. just be .. awesome.

A League of Extraordinary Super Heroes is hard to find. Hard to create. But if you really want to achieve something earth-shattering in this world, and come out the other end a better more complete person .. then you need to join a team. Make a team. Lead a team. Find a team.

4. Holy Catchphrase RadMan!

What are some well-known Catchphrases?

Up! Up! and Away!

Tarzan cry

Hulk Smash!

Flame On!

It's clobbering time!

"Are You Having A Laugh?"

Crafting a memorable catchphrase is very important to the life of a Developer.

Having a simple catchphrase can be the difference between having a great product, and having a great product that is on people's lips.

Can you envisage your catchphrase in general conversation?

At this point, I'd like to encourage some audience participation.

Let say, for example, that you and your company build software

for the medical industry. The software does funky stuff, collating info at the surgery and sending it up to a super duper big hive-mind db.

I'm going to start us off with a few catchphrases .. but then I'd like to give you all the floor for a few minutes to come up with some more .. yell them out, speak softly .. whatever floats your boat.

"Big Brother Was A Lie"

"Saving Lives, Saving Data"

"Fixed Up Good"

"Practice What You Leech"

...

[at end]

If nothing else, making a Catchphrase will get you to examine what it is you do.

Get yourself a Catchphrase!

5. Spandex Tights

(heh heh) The Catchphrase for this point is ...

Wear Your Undies On The Outside.

Who doesn't like spandex? I mean, seriously, what's not to like?

How we present ourselves, our companies, our products, is most definately important.

But we know this, it's an obvious aspect of Development, hard to do .. but still, we know.

Today, you need to start thinking about wearing your undies on the outside. Just like the Super Heroes.

Now, if you'd like, you can actually start wearing y-fronts or boxers outside your pants. That's up to you.

Better however, would be to take a page out of the undies-on-the-outside book.

When we are making ourselves presentable, think outside the box. Make something different about your appearance. Perhaps it's a website that's totally text. Or part of the site. Perhaps a blog given over to some unknown aspect of your area of expertise. It could be giving out interviews, but only speaking in klingon. Ha, i'd like to see that.

Take time here, and you will be rewarded.

I'd like to focus in on one of those examples particularly.

The Interview.

Being interviewed can be daunting. Time consuming. Scary. Annoying.

But I can guarantee you that interviews are an effective and powerful method of showing your undies on the outside.

Getting an interview isn't that hard. But getting one that is effective might take a little more planning. I mean, you could send free copies of your templates to PimpMyClarion to get free press, but it's readership of 3 means that probably wouldn't be a smart idea. Wait. No. There's at least 10 readers .. per week .. COME ON BRUCE, I WANT OFFICE INSIDE SO I CAN GET SEND TO!!!

Heh heh.

Ahem. Anyway.

There are two areas we can focus on. The Clarion Community, and the Outside World.

I think that in the next year, you should aim to be interviewed at least once in both of the spheres.

The Community is a cinch. There are at least two blogs that will interview you. Ha ha. You can organise between yourselves to podcast each other in an audio (or even video) interview. Or just exchange emails with a bunch of questions. I've done a couple of both of those types .. and they're not easy, but very rewarding.

The Outside World, now that seems harder. But in reality, it should be a lot simpler. There are almost infinitely possibilities. Magazines, Websites, Blogs, Radio, Podcasts, TV, Books .. the list goes on.

You could invite magazines to review your product. Or blogs, websites .. something. Contact the IT departments of newspapers, magazines, websites and arrange for them to have a demonstration of your product. It might not work the first twenty times, but that next time will make all the difference.

If you have a product that is built on Clarion .. and you take up the challenge to Wear Your Undies On The Outside .. then get yourself interviewed at least twice over the next year. You will bring benefit both to yourself, and to the Clarion community. Which in turn benefits you .. it's the wonderful cycle of .. community. Can i say that word again.

6. Spider-Sense

Can anyone tell me what Spider Sense is?

(It's one of Peter Parker's more awesome abilities .. to sense danger in a limited capacity .. and which they totally botched in the latest movie .. ahem, anyway)

Support has usually boiled down to methods of communication where the Client contacts us. They have a problem, they then initiate dialogue.

Wouldn't it be awesome if somehow we could be there before they even think of the problem? Be able to dodge away from Gobby's crazy blade dealies just before they sliced you to ribbons.

Simply put, we need to create the illusion that our product (or us) is ready and waiting. More, that we are asking the right questions before they need answering.

Put them in your app, somewhere easily visible, but not confronting.

Remember, this is above and beyond having a kicking support website, having instant chat through the browser running. It goes beyond answering those fifty emails a day.

This is more.

I've got a great (and stolen) example of how to achieve this.

When the user starts up your application, present them with a page (a webpage most like) of information. It could be a bunch of news items. It could be a greeting. But in that page .. Ask the right question! Have the links for sending you a problem. To tell you how they like or dislike the application. Or however smart your psychology gets. But here, in a page like this, that the User views every time they start the program (and so becomes wrote in their memory) Ask them the right Question.

So skill up on your Spider Sense. Create that understanding in the memory of the User .. that you are there, anticipating their request for help, or their acknowledgement of your awesomeness.

7. The Magic Ingredient

So, to wrap it up .. before I make my final point .. the Super Heroes Guide To Development is about what?

1. Having an Origin Story.

2. Knowing your Proton Energy Pills, and knowing your Kryptonite.

3. Being (and/or Building) a League of Extraordinary Super Heroes

4. It's about creating your own Catchphrase ..

5. Wearing your Undies on the outside,

6. And activating your Spider Sense!

How do we achieve these things?

We need courage. Conviction. Imagination. Excitement. Passion .. and we need the secret ingredient.

A little splash of Crazy.

I'd like to sing you my last point .. the magic ingredient .. a little bit of crazy ..

This is .. A Clarion Love Song