



Um, what noise?

■ **THEY SAY THAT IF YOU HAVE** a jackhammer operating nearby, the noise will be incredibly annoying at first, but as time goes by, you'll get used to that loud background noise. In time, you won't even hear it.

I'm writing this column with a jackhammer pounding on concrete 20 feet away. We'll see just how true that is.

In IT, we get used to background annoyances too. Temporary work-arounds become permanent. Rebooting to solve software problems becomes routine. Pidgin magic to handle flaky hardware is passed down from one systems administrator to another.

After a while, we don't think of those things as problems. We don't even notice them. Know who does? New employees.

They're the ones who are astounded at what their co-workers put up with. They can't understand why all the old hands tolerate a kludgy procedure, why they're unfazed by a network that often suddenly



: frankly speaking
by frank hayes

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stops responding, why they never, ever go near the online help system.

At least, they're astounded at first. Soon enough, they learn that the kludgy procedure is the one known-safe path through a minefield of legacy bugs.

And that the network freezes at predictable times that are easy to work around. And that entering the help system wipes out all your current work.

And in short order, they'll be doing things the way everyone else does. They won't think of

those once-astounding annoyances at all. They won't even notice. And an opportunity for IT will be lost.

Every new hire is a fresh set of eyes. He sees the problems that everyone else ignores.

We can use that. But we have to get the timing right. It's not much good to ask a new employee about annoyances as soon as you set him up with his PC. Until he learns procedures and gets into the swing of things, he won't know how to answer.

And after two or three months? By then, the new guy will have been assimilated into The Way We Do It Here. What was at first as jarring as jackhammer noise, he'll no longer notice.

But somewhere in between, there's a sweet spot. Use it.

Some users won't say much, but you can gain useful intelligence about how your systems are actually working.

In short, you'll get the maximum benefit from that new hire before he's blind and deaf to all those virtual jackhammers that everyone else ignores too.

Think before you buy VAs

■ **THE MEDIA IS BUZZING ABOUT** virtual appliances (VAs) as company after company issues a press release about some fancy new virtual appliance that will protect your virtual machines from each other.

Now I can sell you an "appliance" and you'll inherently assume it's a good thing. Perhaps someone can enlighten me on what exactly we're protecting against. No customer I know would put DMZ virtual machines on the same physical box as internal corporate machines. And on the topic of machines in the same zone, well most customers don't plug each separate physical server into a separate physical switch and run a hardware firewall between the two networks. So why would we be worried about doing that for our virtualized servers?

The business case is terrible too. At last check, there is no a virtual appliance on the market right now that supports Vmotion. When you get into the



: security insider
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detail, there's a long list of limitations on machine portability. And now that all network traffic has to go through the VA, there's a lot of horsepower that's going to get used up. So the number of virtual machines you can run per physical machines is reduced. So let me see: I want to create a layer of security I don't currently worry about and in doing so, I reduce my server consolidation benefits and eliminate my machine portability and high availability benefits. Someone sign me up now!

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