



"You will be safe here"



THAT PERSON WHO HELPS OTHERS SIMPLY BECAUSE IT SHOULD OR
MUST BE DONE, AND BECAUSE IT IS THE RIGHT THING TO DO,
IS INDEED WITHOUT A DOUBT, A REAL **SUPERHERO**.

-STAN LEE



**Know the
essential
tools of the trade**



Learn to use those tools creatively



But...
Your most reliable tool
can become toxic



Powerful tools, used indiscriminately, can hurt everyone





Even "inelegant" solutions can be powerful



**Others might do
the same thing
you do, but
they got here
differently.**

**When you meet the next generation,
help them be better than you were.**



Recognize the unsung heroes

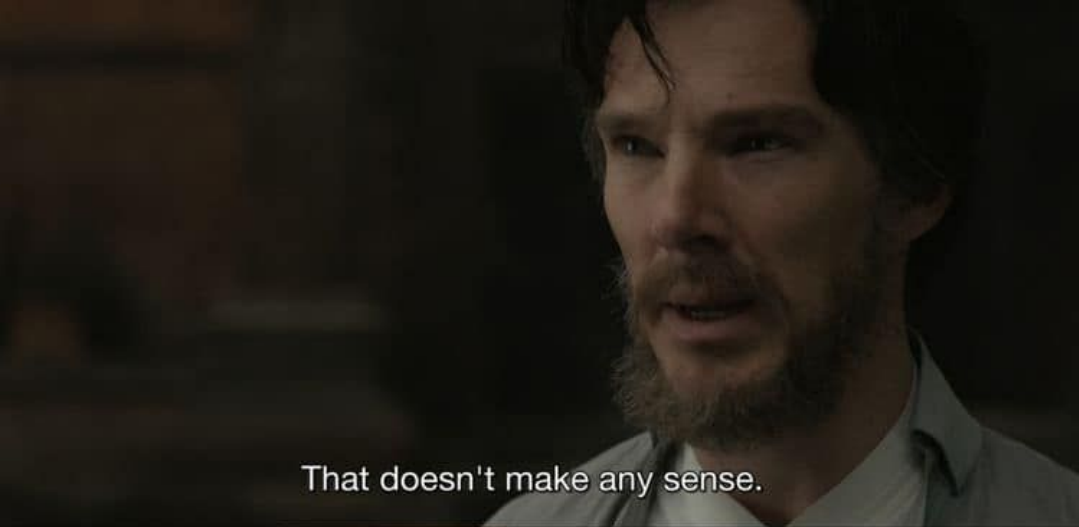


**Strength and power
come in many forms**




A scene from the movie Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness. Wong, on the right, is a man with a shaved head wearing a dark, patterned robe and holding a book. Strange, on the left, is a man with dark hair and a beard wearing a light-colored robe. They are standing in a dimly lit room with bookshelves in the background. A warm light source is visible in the bottom left corner.

Wong: How's your Sanskrit?
Strange: I'm fluent in Google Translate



That doesn't make any sense.



Not everything does.
Not everything has to.

**Be comfortable
with confusion**

It's never too late to try again



Learn to let go



A bad habit that works is still not a good habit



(Fear of failure) made me
a great doctor.

*It's **kept** you from greatness.
Fear keeps you from learning
the simplest and most
significant lesson of all.*

Which is?

It's not about you.



There are never too many sorcerers in the world



**Sign up. Apply.
Raise your hand.**

Put on the costume.

Miles: Can I return it if it doesn't fit?

***Stan Lee: It always fits.
Eventually.***



**“If you have an idea
that you genuinely think is good,
don’t let some idiot talk you out of it.”**

- Stan Lee



Career, interactions

Working With Someone Doesn't Mean Liking Them

Moving past the buddy cop cliché hyped by the trailers and an even cursory review of the series, it becomes clear at the outset our two main protagonists, Sam and Bucky, don't hate each other. But they also wouldn't seek each other out—they make each other uncomfortable, both because of their personalities and because of their complex relationships with special abilities, super-heroism in general, and—most importantly—with Steve Rogers.

With all this said (and comedic bickering aside), they quickly fall into a relationship where they freely challenge each other's excuses and force each other to justify or reconsider their motivations. They also have a shared sense of commitment to whatever goal is in front of them and have specific requirements for how the goal is achieved and which outcomes they will (and won't) tolerate.

Finally, because both Sam and Bucky have their own baggage, they develop a relationship where they won't allow each other to shirk their responsibilities—to the mission, to others they respect, and to themselves.

Pair programming, agile development, and scrums are just the latest in a long line of team-based structures IT has embraced. The stereotype of the lone IT person working in a dingy, windowless space lit only by the flicker of fluorescent bulbs is as incorrect as it is persistent. More often, we're working in highly fluid pairs and teams whose composition shift²¹ and change depending on the day and issue at hand

Falcon: Planning, career, strategy

Faking It Without a Plan to Make It Isn't a Great Strategy

From the moment he's introduced, John Walker (the "new" Captain America) is clearly a man struggling with imposter syndrome. This isn't far from the emotional state we find Sam Wilson in at the start of the series, struggling with how he could possibly fill the shoes of a "living legend."

To be sure, both have experience and achievements to recommend them for the job. But whereas Sam chooses to sidestep the promotion, John (with the encouragement of his friend and his wife) tries to mask the doubt and push forward.

In and of itself, Walker's choice isn't a bad one. The flaw—and it's an expression of his underlying character—is how he has no visible plan to overcome his doubts. In the end, it becomes his undoing.

The IT analog relates to situations where we feel out of our depth, unequal to the task, or simply unprepared. In these moments, imposter syndrome can hit hard. Faced with crushing self-doubt, "just push through it" may be the only option available to us, and that's OK. What's NOT OK is to stop there.

If our doubts are anything more than momentary, if we know they'll haunt us and affect our work and personal lives, we need to formulate a plan. We need to plan a path forward, one where we can gain the skills, experiences, or insights to

Spider-Verse: Growth, balance, mental health

Pushing outside of our comfort zones is good, but if it doesn't fit, we need to recognize it before we hurt ourselves.

“Try harder than you think you can!” “Push yourself just a little further!” “Do more than you planned!”

It seems like the message to try and exceed our limits is everywhere, and is mostly a positive one. We should want to keep improving ourselves, and having a cheerleader (even an inspirational coffee mug) can be an effective way to reinforce that desire.

But there can come a point when our attempt to push through the discomfort in pursuit of growth becomes unhealthy. When we are no longer “lean and mean,” but “emaciated and ornery;” when we’ve trimmed the fat, stripped the muscle, and are now cutting into bone.

In the movie, this lesson becomes clear when we see the other Spider-Folk experience the slow but deadly effects of being in a dimension not their own. Their cells are slowly dying, and if they don’t get back home, they have no hope of survival.

In our dimension—where we’re more likely to be accosted by users claiming “the internet is down” than by ^{it}ik. All rights reserved | 23
plasma-gauntlet wielding stalkers—it would be nice if being dangerously outside of our comfort zone was as clear

Spider-Verse: Relax, balance, mental health

When you get quiet and listen to your inner voice, that's when you are the most powerful.

Since “Into the Spider-Verse” is largely an origin story about Miles’ transformation into his dimension’s one-and-only Spider-Man, much of the action focuses on him learning about his powers and how to use them. The difference between this and many other superhero origin stories is that Miles is surrounded by the other Spider-Folk, who are much more experienced. This comes to a head near the end of the movie, when the others decide that Miles’ inexperience is too much of a liability and leave him behind. After an entire movie of Miles running, jumping, and awkwardly swinging from moment to moment, idea to idea, and crisis to crisis, this is where, for the first time, Miles finally stops and just **is** for a moment. He takes a few precious seconds to center himself, to understand where he is, and where he wants to be. In that moment, he is finally able to get in touch with all his abilities and control them.

Much like knowing how to relax and let go, being able to “check in” with ourselves in this way is incredibly powerful. Over the length of our IT careers, we will find ourselves surrounded, as Miles did, by people who are doing the same work as us but are vastly more experienced and confident about it. If we’re lucky, some of those people will be patient with us as we learn the ropes. But even so, being patient with ourselves—being able to stop for a moment in the middle of the cyclone of ideas, tickets, questions, incidents, doubts, system failures, and fears—will serve us well.

Strange: career

Persistence often pays off

At one point in the movie, the Ancient One sends Strange on a trip through alternate dimensions, then asks, “Have you seen that at a gift shop?” When Strange begs her to teach him, her response is a firm “no.” Hours later, Strange is wailing at the door, begging to be let in.

At some point in your career, you may have an epiphany and realize that your career goals point you toward a certain technology or discipline. And, just your luck, there’s a team that specializes in exactly that! So you go to the manager or team lead and ask if you can join up.

Your first request to join the team may fall on deaf ears. And your second. You may need to hang, like a sad puppy dog, around them in the lunchroom or around the water cooler for a while. Unlike Doctor Strange, it may take weeks or even months of persistence, rather than a few hours. But that doesn’t mean it’s not worth it.

Falcon: Balance, mental health

Don't Let Problems Get in Your Head

Near the start of the movie, Bucky comes back into contact with Baron Helmut Zemo, the mastermind who set in motion the events leading to the break-up of the Avengers. In the past, Zemo also had keywords he used to control Bucky in his incarnation as the Winter Soldier. In The Falcon and the Winter Soldier, however, the trigger words don't work. This is largely due to the therapy and healing Bucky received from Black Panther's sister, Shuri, in Wakanda.

The lesson I'm pulling from this is about how certain problems can cause us to have unwanted (and undesirable) reactions. It might be a type of problem (syntax errors in our code), the time of day when certain situations occur (after hours), or issues from a specific vector (people walking up and asking an innocent question). Regardless, the problem is when our response is completely out of proportion to the issue itself. After one such incident, we may even ask ourselves, "Why do I let it get to me like that?"

Like Bucky in Wakanda, the path to resisting these triggers may be a long one, but it always starts with the important first step of recognition. From there, we must do the hard internal work to learn, grow, and improve.

Because allowing a problem to control us is never good.

Logan: Balance, empathy, mental health

Even when your experiences have made you jaded, hang on to your capacity to care.

Tightly connected to the previous thought about encouraging the next generation of IT professionals is the idea that we need to do things NOW that allow us to hold on to our capacity to care about people. As Thomas LaRock wrote recently, “Relationships Matter More Than Money” (<https://thomaslarock.com/2017/05/relationships-matter-money/>). I would extend this further to include the idea that relationships matter more than a job, and they certainly matter more than a bad day.

In the movie, no moment exemplifies this as poignantly as the line that became one of the key voiceover elements in the trailer. In finding a family in trouble, Charles demands they stop and help. Logan retorts, “Someone will come along!” Charles responds quietly but just as forcefully, “Someone HAS come along.”

Logan: empathy

Get out among the “regular” people, the users. It will feed and inform your work. REALLY meet them, though. Don’t just sit on the sidelines, aloof and observant.

At the start of the movie, we see Logan driving a limo for a ride-sharing service. He’s out and among the people, which would make many folks feel more connected to the world around them. Hearing stories, experiencing a moment in time that becomes a slice of his own life. He ferries a business executive, a bunch of frat boys shouting “U-S-A” as they cross the border into Mexico, a bachelorette party, and a family on their way to a funeral. As stark as the differences are between passengers, they are not nearly as stark as Logan’s emotional disassociation with them.

Contrast this with a scene later in the movie, when Logan, Charles, and Laura sit down to dinner with the farming family they assisted (as mentioned in my previous example). While dancing around the nature of the school, Charles and Logan (acting the part of father and son) express touching affection for their past life and each other. Doing so allows the family who has invited them into their home to join the conversation.

Later, when they are alone, Charles tries to impress this difference on Logan:

Charles: “You know, Logan? This is what a life will explain. A home, people who love each other. A safe place. You should take a moment and feel it.”

Strange: learning

Even broken things can help you find your way

On his way to the mystical school of Kamar Taj, Doctor Strange is accosted by muggers and ordered to give up his watch. Even though he is rescued from what appears to be a brutal beating, his watch isn't so lucky. It's only later that we realize there's an inscription on the back that reads, "Only time will tell how much I love you," indicating that the watch is from Christina, one of the few people Strange has made a personal connection with.

While the joke, "Even a broken clock is right twice a day" comes to mind, the lesson I'm thinking of is a little deeper. In IT, we often overlook the broken things, whether it's code that doesn't compile, a software feature that doesn't work as advertised, or hardware that's burnt out, in favor of systems and solutions that run reliably. And that's not a bad choice, generally speaking.

But our broken things can still teach us a lot. I've rarely learned anything from a server that ran like clockwork for months on end. But I've learned a lot about pin-outs, soldering, testing, timing, memory registers, and more when I've tried to get an old boat anchor working again.

Sometimes that knowledge transferred. Sometimes it didn't. But even if not, the work grounded me in the reality of the craft of IT, and gave me a sense of accomplishment and direction.

Spider-verse: career, learning

Even a bad mentor may have something to teach you.

Life has handed Peter a few raw deals and he's definitely worse for the wear because of it. Cynical and world-weary, he's not the greatest teacher for Miles. Despite that, Miles is a ready student who is at a point in his life where he still has a sense of wonder, but has the street smarts to see the lessons in people's actions over their words. Miles' willingness to believe in Peter's ability to show him the ropes as Spider-Man carries both the student and the mentor through.

In a long (and hopefully fulfilling) career in IT, we can learn from many different people. While some of these mentors will be gifted with the ability to see us clearly and say the right thing to point us in the right direction, far more will be well-meaning, but flawed individuals who may be pressed for time, short on patience, and caught up in their own poor choices. Nevertheless, they can teach us beyond serving as an example of what *not* to do. Being a student of life is one of the most valuable skills any IT professional can aspire to attain because it leads to more discoveries.

Logan: Tools

New IT pros may take your tools and techniques and use them differently. Don't judge.

One of the interesting differences between Logan and Laura is that she has two claws that come from her hands (versus Logan's three), and one that comes out of her foot. Charles speculates that females of a species develop different weapons for protection versus hunting. Logan seems unimpressed even though he just witnessed Laura taking out at least three soldiers with her foot-claws alone.

The lesson for us is to remember that tools are there to be used. If it achieves the desired result and avoids downstream complications, then it doesn't matter if the usage diverges from "the way we did it in my day." Thinking outside the box (something my fellow Head Geek™, Destiny Bertucci, talks about all the time <https://thwack.solarwinds.com/community/thwack-event-session.jspa?sessionId=1017>) is a sign of creativity and engagement, two things that should never be downplayed.

Logan: relationships, career

It's never about what you do (or what you have achieved, fixed, etc.). The story of your IT career has always been and will always be about who you met, who you helped, and who you built a connection with.

The movie *Logan* is not, at its heart, about stabbing people in the head with metal claws, or car chases, or mutant abilities. While there is plenty of that, the core of the movie is about two men coming to terms with themselves and their legacy, and how that legacy will affect the world after they are gone.

It is a movie about the very real father-son relationship between Logan and Charles – how they love each other but wish the other could be “better” in some way. They understand that they cannot change the other person, but have to learn to live with them.

It is also about caring for another person: about whether we choose to care or not, about how we express that care, about how those feelings are received by the other person and reciprocated (or not).

Once again, I am invoking the blog post by fellow Head Geek Thomas LaRock: “Relationships Matter More Than Money” (<https://thomaslarock.com/2017/05/relationships-matter-money/>).

“When you use the phrase, “It’s not personal, it’s just business,” you are telling the other person that money is more important than your relationship. Let that sink in for a minute. You are telling someone, perhaps a (current, maybe