

# Hackerman's Hacking Tutorials

The knowledge of anything, since all things have causes, is not acquired or complete unless it is known by its causes. - Avicenna

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## The Dark Side of "Manual Work is a Bug"

This is a revisit of [Manual Work is a Bug](#) during my ramp up at my [new job](#). I will discuss my experience doing some automation at my previous job and the flip side to the utopia painted by the article.

### Who am I?

I am Parsia, a security engineer at [Electronic Arts](#).

I write about application security, reverse engineering, Go, cryptography, and (obviously) videogames.

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in

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## Why The Revisit?

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I discovered the article last year. I love it. You can read my initial observations in [Reflections on "Manual Work is a Bug"](#).

Recently, I left my job after almost six years (70 months to be exact). By the end, I had automated some of my weekly routines and had this huge knowledge on the internal network called `Parsia-Clone` (it dwarfs my external one). We had this running joke that the clone will become sentient one day and do my job.

I realized I have forgotten why I made some important decisions and why I was doing things a certain way.

Most importantly, I had forgotten the pains. I was in the happy phase of the process where my automation had given me free time. About one day every two weeks (sometimes every week) I sat down, documented what I had learned and performed maintenance.

With a clean slate:

- I can do some things better this time.
- I can adapt my routine to our processes here.
- I can think about why I made some decisions.
- I have time to do stuff.

## Time, It Needs Time, To Win Back Your Love Again

Having time. That's kind of important. And that is my biggest issue with the original article. It tells the tale of two sysadmins. Both are busy, intelligent and can write code.

*Let me tell you about two systems administrators I know. Both were overloaded, busy IT engineers.*

But they do things differently

*The successful person had the same pressures but somehow managed to write a lot of code.*

## **Stop! Hammertime!**

Both sysadmins are overworked and under pressure but one (let's call them The Automator) manages to write a lot of code/documentation.

- How does The Automator find the time?
- Can they even manage to finish assigned work?

Remember both sysadmins are already overloaded.

Writing documentation/steps/code takes time. A lot of time. Especially when you are just starting and getting into the mindset. Even format and medium is a huge timesink. Hint: Your corporation probably has something like Confluence.

The time has to come from somewhere.

- Work time: You are likely overloaded, you do other stuff instead of your job.
- Personal time: RIP work/life balance.

So The Automator most likely:

- Got fired because they wrote documentation instead of closing tickets.
- Burned out because they worked after hours.

I was the second person. I worked long hours and almost burned out. People with family and obligations cannot do this and let's be honest, no one should.

## Even the mythical Russian build engineer had this problem.

The myth started in [bash.im](https://bash.im). Read the translation at [jitbit](https://jitbit.com). It's about this legendary Russian build engineer who had [scripts](#) for everything. For example, one:

*sends a text message "late at work" to his wife (apparently). [...] The job fires if there are active SSH-sessions on the server after 9pm with his login.*

Seems like even automation legends overwork. Our ideal person is someone who has automated his excuses for working long hours. SAD!

## But Automation Gives You Time

Sure it does, it's most likely a net benefit in the long run. Automation will give you some free time to do more automation (well, hopefully).

But The Automator probably had no life for a while (assuming not fired).

## Should Everyone Automate?

Each person needs to figure out if it's worth the time and energy.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- Can things be automated?
  - This is important, not everything can/needs to be automated.
- Do you have the extra time?
- Do you like doing it?
  - It shouldn't be a hassle and a second job.
- What do you get out of it?

- Does corporate care?
- Does it help you and other people?

There's also the option of automating your job but not sharing it. See the following urban legends:

- [Is it unethical for me to not tell my employer I've automated my job?](#)
- [Finally fired after 6 years - reddit](#)

## What Did We Learn Here Today?

The original article is nice but it glossed over a very important part of the process and let's say its Achilles' heel.

Starting and continuing automation has a very significant time investment. This time has to come from somewhere. Either you get it through your corporation (congrats, you and me are some of the very few lucky ones) or it comes out of your time.

Posted by Parsia • Apr 17, 2019

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Very insightful, Parsiya. I've shared this around at my new gig as well as with some friends!

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Thanks Robert. I am glad you liked it. Congrats on the new gig.

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