How to Become an Exceptional DBA

By Brad McGehee

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

I have worked with database applications for most of my career, and have been a DBA for last twelve years. I started with the computer industry in 1981, the year the first IBM Personal Computer, running DOS 1.0, was released. In fact, I owned one of the first models off the production line.

My first exposure to a database application was in 1982. It was called TIM (Total Information Management) and was written by some guys in Lenexa, KS, in Interpretative BASIC, the version of BASIC that was built into the first IBM PCs. It was slow, hard to use, and very buggy, but it whetted my taste for databases. In 1984, the same developers dropped TIM and developed a product suite called Smartware, which included a more-sophisticated database application. This is when I first learned how to design databases and develop database applications.

It wasn't until 1996 that I began to get serious about being a full-time DBA. At the time, I was working as a Microsoft Certified Trainer, teaching virtually every certification class Microsoft offered at the time, including networking, development, Exchange, and SQL Server. I soon realized that I could not keep up with that much technology and that I needed to specialize. I considered many options, finally narrowing it down to becoming a DBA, specializing in Microsoft SQL Server. One of the deciding factors was how much I'd enjoyed my past experience working with databases.

I quit my job as a trainer and set out to become a DBA. While I had some experience with databases, and a good technical knowledge of SQL Server (from teaching it), I had never worked with databases on a full-time basis. Lacking this "real" experience, I knew I was taking a risk, but you have to start somewhere.

I got my first full-time DBA job with a company that had many full-time DBAs on staff. Unfortunately, none of the other DBAs wanted to share their knowledge with me. I was the new kid on the block and they wanted to see me sink or swim on my own. While I was familiar with the technical aspects of using databases such as SQL Server, my lack of day-to-day practical DBA experience was making life tough. It was hard to admit at the time, but I really didn't know what DBAs did day in and day out. I went through a painful year, learning most everything the hard way, making many mistakes and then learning from them. I was starting to get discouraged.

Then opportunity knocked. By accident, while browsing the Internet, I found a SQL Server DBA job offered at another company. I sent off a resume and was talking to a recruiter within hours. In fact, I had a job interview the following Monday for the job. Things were happening a little fast all of a sudden.

I went to the job interview and was hired on the spot. I was a little surprised at how fast I was hired, and it was a big boost to my confidence. I started the new job within two weeks. Then I got a new surprise. This DBA position was a brand new position and I had to handle all of the DBA work myself. There was nobody to ask for help or for guidance. I was on my own. I guess I should have asked more questions during the interview. I had learned a lot from my previous experience, but my confidence in my skills was low.

So there I was, in a new job, and the company was dependent on me to be their first, full-time SQL Server DBA. I have to admit, it was a little unsettling. However, I guess the situation motivated me to very quickly rise to the occasion. I immediately immersed myself in every piece of information I could find on how to be a great DBA. I read books, I searched the Internet, I attended conferences, spoke with other DBAs, and I worked very hard. Very quickly, my self-confidence in my skills went up. My skills were noticed and appreciated by my manager. Once I got on this path of trying to excel in my job, I found I couldn't stop. The company had put a lot of faith in me, and I didn't want to disappoint them.

As I progressed, I wrote down almost everything I learned so that I wouldn't forget it. Eventually, I had a huge document on my hands, and it was starting to become hard for me to find information, when I needed to refer back to it later. To remedy this problem, I decided to convert the document to HTML and use a local search engine to find the information I needed. Soon after starting this project, I realized that, for about the same amount of work, I could create a simple website and share the information I had collected with others. I figured that if I could use this information, then perhaps others might also. And was I ever surprised. Once I launched the website, SQL-Server-Performance.Com, it immediately became popular. I did not realize that there were that many DBAs seeking the same kind of information I was seeking. With the positive reception of the website, I was motivated to continue to add new content, which forced me to continue to learn more so that I could share what I learned.

As the website became more established, I began to get e-mails from people wanting to learn how to become a DBA. The same types of questions also appeared in the forums of the website. At the time, I answered these questions the best I could. I even wrote an article called "The Self-Taught DBA", which received a lot of attention. However, I never addressed the question of how someone becomes a great DBA.

Eventually, I began speaking at SQL Server conferences and started meeting lots of DBAs, novices and experts alike. I observed that most DBAs fell into one of three groups. One group of DBAs fell into their job by some career accident and it was just a job to them. Another group of DBAs were at the novice or intermediate level and really wanted to become expert DBAs and take their career seriously. The final group comprised career DBAs who had become experts through lots of hard work and many years of experience. I began thinking about what differentiates an average, or competent, DBA from a truly exceptional DBA, and the resources that were available to help DBAs progress from the second to the third group.

There was quite a bit of technical information out there – I had contributed a fair bit of it myself – but I couldn't think of a single resource that offered DBAs advice on how to guide and progress their DBA career. After a lot of thinking, I honed in on the concept of an "Exceptional DBA". What did it mean to be an Exceptional DBA? How did you go about becoming one? What technical skills were required? What other skills were important? I had learnt most of this the hard way, and I decided that I wanted to share what I now knew.

This book is my attempt at doing just that. Its purpose is to provide a "career guide" that will help those individuals who want to become DBAs, or who are now DBAs and want to excel in their job, to become Exceptional DBAs. In the past, if you wanted to become a DBA, you had to jump in and figure your way around, just like I did. There was no guide to help you get started. I hope that this book will be such a getting started guide, helping many people to embark on a successful career as a DBA without wasting a lot of their time figuring out the basics on their own.

Ask yourself the question: why be an average DBA when you can be an exceptional DBA? If you can't think of a good reason why not, and you are willing to put what you learn into action, then this book can help you become an exceptional DBA, and help you excel in your career.

What this Book Covers

This book is not about the technical aspects of being an Exceptional DBA. There are already many good resources available on this topic. This book is a career guide that will show you, step-by-step, specifically what you can do to differentiate yourself from the crowd, so that you can be an Exceptional DBA. While I focus on how to become an Exceptional SQL Server DBA, the advice in this book applies to any DBA, no matter what database software they use.

Specifically, these are the topics that are covered:

- Why I Should Become an Exceptional DBA
- Characteristics of the Exceptional DBA
- Specialize: You Can't Do It All
- Hone Your Skill Set
- Is Professional Certification Really Necessary
- Participate in the SQL Server Community
- Manage Your Career, Don't Let it Manage You
- Manage Your Brand Within Your Organization
- Manage Your Online Brand
- Take Action Now

Once you finish this book, you will have the background you need so that you too can become an Exceptional DBA. If you are considering becoming a DBA, or are a DBA and want to be more than an average DBA, this is the book to get you started.

Your Feedback

This book attempts to distil my views on the sorts of skills, attitudes and abilities that mark out an Exceptional DBA, based on my 12 years in the industry, as a "self-taught" DBA. Along the way, I've learned from many hard-working DBAs, and I describe in this book many of the traits that they displayed.

As such, I hope that it will provide an excellent starting point on your quest to become an Exceptional DBA. However, I also realize that it is just a start. What will make this book an even better guide is *your feedback*.

I'm sure there are countless ideas, strategies and traits that I've missed out, and I'd like to hear about them. Please send any suggestions, ideas and criticisms that you have to exceptionaldba@red-gate.com. I promise that we will consider and respond to all feedback. If your idea gets incorporated in the next version of this book, we will send you a complimentary copy on publication!

Thanks, and enjoy,

Brad M McGehee

CHAPTER 1: WHY SHOULD I BECOME AN EXCEPTIONAL DBA?

Before I can tell you why you should become an Exceptional DBA, you must first understand what it means to be an Exceptional DBA. It can involve a lot of hard work, though the rewards can also be commensurately high.

What is an Exceptional DBA?

While I could start out with a dictionary definition, I feel that, ultimately, an Exceptional DBA is defined by his or her actions. So, instead, place yourself in the shoes of a company's senior DBA, in each of the following scenarios, and consider how you would react:

1. You're just about to go home for the day, when the SAN supporting a mission-critical SQL Server cluster fails, bringing the company's systems to a grinding halt.

2. It's the weekend and you hear on the radio that a Force 3 hurricane is about to hit your area.

3. You've just started your new DBA job, and you find out that the databases don't have any security configured, and backups haven't been made in weeks.

4. You notice that a higher than normal number of queries have been hitting the payroll database lately. You find that a sales manager with the company has been running the queries. He has the security rights to perform the queries as a member of the ExecutiveCommittee group.

5. Word has just come down from the top that an often-delayed database project has to be ready in eight weeks, no excuses. An inexperienced Project Manager is the cause of the delay.

6. The company CFO has been pitched a slick sales presentation on a new BI application that will "save" the company millions of dollars. After some investigation, you're concerned that it will actually end up costing the company tens of thousands of dollars in wasted resources to implement, and that it won't do what it is advertised to do.

There is no single correct response to any of these dilemmas, but in my opinion (and experience), an Exceptional DBA would respond something like as follows:

1. **Critical SAN gone down.** You immediately set about contacting all relevant parties and implementing the organization's disaster recovery plan. You don't get any sleep for over 36 hours until the system is back up and running as normal.

2. **Hurricane on its way.** You head into work immediately, double-check that all the database backups have been successful and that the company is prepared to move to a backup site should the data center be damaged by the hurricane.

3. **No security? No backups.** You immediately go to the IT manager, knock on the door, and explain what the problems are and how you intend to fix them.

4. **Suspicious activity on the payroll database.** Despite the security rights he has, you know that the sales manager has no business looking at payroll data, especially for employees that he is not responsible for. You turn over the trace results to your boss.

5. **Inexperienced PM and an "impossible" deadline.** You immediately call a meeting of all those involved in the project, take responsibility for the delay and outline exactly how you will lead the team to a successful completion of the project. You don't care whose "fault" it was, you just want to get the job done on time and done well.

6. **CFO wants to implement a potentially disastrous new BI system.** After a quiet and thorough investigation on the product you write up a paper on the problems with

the application and why it won't fit well within the organization. You then ask your boss to pass it to the CFO, without asking for any credit for writing the paper. You realize that if the advice comes from your boss, then it will carry more weight with the misinformed CFO.

Did you notice a trend above? While you may not agree with all the examples given above, I think you will notice that Exceptional DBAs are not your typical 40 hour-a-week employees. You'll gain your knowledge wherever it is available, be it through a book or website, from your peers, at a conference or a training course. If you want to become an Exceptional DBA, you have to be a lifelong learner. Database technology changes often, and there is always something new to learn. Therefore, you will always be looking for opportunities to improve and will willingly, for example, spend all day Saturday attending a local code camp in order to improve your skills.

Sharing your knowledge is a big part of what you do, as an Exceptional DBA. You will rarely turn down the opportunity to share knowledge with your peers. You might, for example:

- Participate in community forums and newsgroups.
- Voluntarily offer to mentor junior DBAs in areas where they lack knowledge, experience or confidence.
- Speak at community conferences and, especially, local user group meetings.

In short, there are many different possible ways to define an Exceptional DBA. In this book, an Exceptional DBA is defined as a DBA who is the top ten percent of their profession. These are DBAs who:

- Have outstanding knowledge and experience working with SQL Server.
- Are completely dependable and reliable.
- Willing to work alone or as part as a team.
- Have a "get it done" attitude and don't blame others for problems.
- Fully understand their responsibility to protect the organization's data.
- Have the ability to communicate effectively in writing and verbally.
- Shares his or her knowledge with the co-workers and the SQL Server community.

This is not a description of a fantasy DBA Super Hero, but a description of the many hard-working DBAs I have met over the course of my career. Exceptional DBAs can be found almost everywhere, and you can become one too.

Why Bother?

Yes, becoming an Exceptional DBA is hard work, so the question you may be asking now is: "Is it worth all the time and effort it takes to become an Exceptional DBA?" To be honest, this is a decision you have to make; I can't make it for you. You must weigh the pros and cons of becoming an Exceptional DBA and decide for yourself if the benefits outweigh their costs. As you may have already guessed, the 90% of DBAs who aren't exceptional DBAs don't believe the benefits outweigh the costs; otherwise they wouldn't be in the bottom 90%. However, I beg to disagree with them, and I think you should too. For example, consider the following benefits of becoming an Exceptional DBA.

Direct Personal Benefits

DBAs are among the highest paid IT professionals. According to Salary.Com, as of January 2008, the top 10% of all DBAs earn at least $104,803 a year, plus benefits. This is a national average based on all types of database administrators in the United States. I know many DBAs who make over $100,000 a year, and this goal is not as unattainable as you might assume.

Although being fairly paid for a challenging job is important, I don't know of any Exceptional DBAs who are just doing it for the money. Most do it for satisfaction of working in a technically challenging and ever-changing environment. Being an Exceptional DBA affords you the opportunity to keep on the cutting edge of technology. Many new software development ideas are the result of how to make application work better with databases – and I don't think we will see any slowing of technology any time soon.

If that's not enough, consider these additional benefits:

- DBAs are needed almost everywhere, small towns and large cities alike, affording you the ability to live almost anywhere you what to live.
- Often, being a DBA affords you the opportunity to travel, assuming you want to. This is especially true if you work as a consultant and travel to client sites. I know many DBAs who travel internationally on a regular basis.
- Most exceptional DBAs have good self-confidence and self-esteem. Most people don't start a particular career for this specific purpose, but self-confidence and self-esteem are benefits that any exceptional person accrues when they perform a job well.

Benefits on the Job

As an Exceptional DBA, you receive more peer respect, more credibility, and more influence in your organization. Being respected by your peers is a great feeling, especially if you are part of a larger team that works well together. Because of the importance of DBAs to organizations, not only is their job held in higher regard than many other IT positions, they are often the last to be laid off, should layoffs occur. We all know developers and other IT personal who have had their job outsourced.

DBAs often have good opportunities for job growth and advancement, whether you are looking to stay with the same company, change companies, or start your own company. Becoming an exceptional DBA, along with good management skills, can be a stepping-stone for becoming a CIO.

Exceptional DBAs have more contacts and knowledge that can help them accomplish their personal goals more easily. While I didn't become a DBA to help others, it has ended up being that way. This side-benefit provides many unexpected rewards.

Benefits to your Organization

Most employees don't think in terms of how valuable they can be to their own organization. This is a shame, because in the real world, more often than not, when you help your organization become more successful, you also become more successful. Many people are sour on how their organization treats them, which affects their ability to perform well. You need to learn how to ignore this negative feeling and, instead, focus on what you can do to help the organization. The rewards can be plentiful. If your organization doesn't work this way, then you need to find one that does.

At some point in your career, you may become the leader of your own organization. Don't you want to create a great environment for your employees, one that reaches out to meet their needs, instead of just focusing on what you want? The more you help others, the more they help you. This is one of the fundamental principles of all business and personal success.

Summary: The Road to Becoming an Exceptional DBA

Now that you have seen what an Exceptional DBA is, and some of the many benefits that accrue from being an Exceptional DBA, are you ready to find out how to accomplish this goal? Great, because the rest of this book will show you exactly what you need to do to become an Exceptional DBA.

CHAPTER 2: CHARACTERISTICS OF THE EXCEPTIONAL DBA

Chapter 1 touched upon some of the common characteristics that define an Exceptional DBA, and why you might want to make the extra effort to become one. In this chapter, I'd like to expand on this discussion and explore in more detail the characteristics that define an Exceptional DBA. Few DBAs will have all these characteristics, but the best DBAs will have most of them.

As you follow the discussion in this chapter, you'll probably find yourself mentally assessing the degree to which you possess a given characteristic. A mental comparison like this is good. It helps you to determine what your strengths are and where your weaknesses lie.

If you find that you don't possess very many of these characteristics right now, don't panic. Keep in mind that most Exceptional DBAs take many years to develop these characteristics and that nobody exhibits all these characteristics all the time. After all, none of us is perfect. Simply regard the characteristics that you don't currently possess as goals that you can work towards over time. Each of these characteristics can be learned when you set your mind to it, just as you have the ability to learn a new SQL Server skill.

Enjoys Technology

If you are reading this book, then I think I can reasonably assume that you already enjoy technology, a key trait of all Exceptional DBAs and IT professionals. The only reason I mention this obvious point is that I occasionally run into DBAs who actually don't appear to enjoy working with technology. For example, at conferences I often sit at breakfast or lunch tables with attendees who I don't know. I ask them about their job and why they are attending the conference. It is always a shock to hear somebody tell me that the only reason they are at the conference is because their boss made them attend. The only advice I can really offer these people is this: find yourself a new career.

Enjoys Challenge

A challenge is an ambiguous concept. That which presents a challenge to one person may be a slam-dunk to another. For example, writing a Transact-SQL script might be a daunting task to some DBAs, but for others, it is something they can do almost in their sleep.

Every DBA faces a different set of challenges in their daily work, and it is not necessarily the ability to respond immediately to a given technical challenge (for example, by dashing off a SQL script) that sets apart the exceptional DBA. It is more their attitude toward challenges that makes the distinction.

Here are some examples that might explain what I mean:

- You have just found out that management wants to upgrade all 350 SQL Servers instances from SQL Server 2005 to SQL Server 2008, by the end of the quarter. Rather than immediately raise objections, the Exceptional DBA will scope out the project, create a plan, and put it into effect as soon as possible. If the DBA determines, after scoping, that it is impossible to complete the job in time given current resources, then he will determine what additional resources are needed and present his findings to his manager.
- A SQL Server instance that has been running smoothly for months suddenly starts running slowly. You are getting lots of phone calls from unhappy users. The Exceptional DBA would immediately gather and analyze the relevant information, make an educated guess as to the cause of the problem, then test it to see if it works. If not, the Exceptional DBA continues to carry out research, seek more information, and test educated guesses, until the problem is resolved.

- A new project manager for the company seems to think that you work for him, when that is not the case. He has assigned you a number of new projects without even consulting you; projects that you don't have time to do. Once the Exceptional DBA discovers this "people problem", he goes to his manager to seek an explanation and works out the matter in a mutually agreeable way, with this manager and the project manager.

Notice that in none of these scenarios did the Exceptional DBA complain about the challenges posed, but instead jumped immediately into resolving the challenge, not putting it off or hoping it would go away on its own.

Exceptional DBAs regard challenges as opportunities to learn something new; to do something different. They aren't afraid of challenges, they look forward to them. In many ways, challenges are just a part of the normal routine of being a DBA.

Enjoys Problem Solving

Every day, DBAs solve problems. They may be as simple as determining why a backup failed, or as complex as creating a disaster recovery plan for a bank. The Exceptional DBA regards problems as a new challenge (see previous trait); a puzzle to solve. This is why they come to work, because each day is different and challenging. If they don't have new problems to solve, they get bored. In other words, the Exceptional DBA enjoys the process of problem solving. For example:

- 8:01 AM: An end-user calls, reporting a deadlock in her application.
- 8:08 AM: An end-user calls complaining about a slow-running report.
- 8:14 AM: You check the backup records for last night and discover that one server ran out of disk space, causing the backup to fail.
- 8:20 AM: You get an e-mail from your manager for a meeting that is to start at 9:00 AM.
- 8:21 AM: A network staffer shows up at your desk, asking why network utilization spiked at 3:30 AM on one of the SQL Servers.
- 8:33 AM: The end-user calls you again, asking if you have fixed the slow running report yet.
- 8: 40 AM: You solve the slow-running report problem.
- 8:51 AM: You free up space and initiate a backup on the server that had a backup failure last night.
- 9:00 AM: You attend the meeting your boss just called.

The above example of an hour in the life of an Exceptional DBA is not unusual. Often, new problems arise so fast that you can't keep up with them. While this may wear out many people, the Exceptional DBA thrives on this kind of activity. Sure, there are times when it is nice to have some peace and quiet to catch up, but most Exceptional DBAs prefer to be busy most of the time.

While Exceptional DBAs enjoy problem solving, they also realize the following important points:

1. Not every problem can be solved.

2. Some problems can be solved after time spent troubleshooting, and can wait.

3. Some problems can be solved after time spent troubleshooting, but need to be fixed *now.*

When cases of type 3 arise, the Exceptional DBA has no issue with asking for help. The Exceptional DBA is comfortable with the idea that they don't know all the answers and that, if time is a problem, calling in help sooner rather than later is the best approach to take. This

could mean posting a question on a forum, or calling Microsoft SQL Server Product Support, or whichever other route is open to them in order to find the answer they need, quickly.

Good with Details

For a DBA, the job is all about details. First, and foremost, the Exceptional DBA must have the detailed, in-depth technical skills they need to perform their daily work. There is no such thing as an "almost perfect" backup or a "fairly good" transaction. In most cases, something either works or it doesn't, and the Exceptional DBA must be intimately familiar with the many and detailed steps required to perform their work.

Second, Exceptional DBAs must be very thorough and meticulous as they perform their work. For example, if a DBA wants to set up security on his or her servers, to prevent any possibility of unauthorized access, they must carefully sort through the many possible ways security could be breached, and protect against each one.

Third, Exceptional DBAs need to be exhaustive and comprehensive when performing their work. For example, when creating a disaster recovery plan for an organization, the DBA must consider every possible disaster, determine how it might affect his or her servers, and develop a plan to minimize the consequences of the disaster occurring.

I am not sure that I would list "enjoying details" as a required characteristic of being an exceptional DBA, but dealing effectively with details is critical.

Embraces Change

As ironic as it sounds, one of the only constants in the career of the Exceptional DBA, is change. While DBAs many not see change every day, changes big and small occur frequently, often with little or no warning. For example:

- A new SQL Server instance needs to be installed and configured.
- Another SQL Server needs its hardware upgraded.
- Patches have to be added to all SQL Server instances on a monthly basis.
- Your current manager quits and you have to "break in" a new one.
- A new ERP system is to be implemented in the company by the end of the year.
- Your company goes out of business and you lose your job.

Sometimes it can be fun, and other times disheartening, but the Exceptional DBA regards change as inevitable. Instead of fighting it, they embrace it, and do the best they can with what is given to them.

Enjoys Learning

If you don't love to learn, there is no way you can keep up with the constant changes in database and related technology. Some general skills, such as problem solving, only have to be learned once. Other skills, such as technology-specific skills, have to be relearned over-and-over again as the technology changes and evolves. The only way to keep up is to become a lifelong learner. You need to take as much time as you can find not only to keep your current skills up to date, but also to add skills to your repertoire.

The Exceptional DBA realizes the need for constant learning and includes it as part of his or her schedule. For example, scheduling in time for learning a new SQL Server skill, reading a professional publication, checking out the latest SQL Server blogs, attending classes or user group meetings, or even attending national conferences, are all ways the Exceptional DBA can keep up.

For the Exceptional DBA, learning is a part of his or her lifestyle and job, not just something that has to be "squeezed in" only when necessary.

Accepts Responsibility

The Exceptional DBA accepts responsibility not only for their assigned tasks, but also for their *actions*. For example, if the DBA is responsible for safeguarding the data integrity of an organization, then the DBA will take all prudent steps required to see that the data is protected.

If that same DBA makes a mistake that causes some data corruption, then he should immediately stand up and admit to the mistake, and not try to minimize his involvement. Besides taking responsibility for their actions, the Exceptional DBA will also offer solutions to prevent the problem from recurring.

Maintains Professionalism

Professionalism on the job covers many different areas, but it really comes done to a single idea: respect for others and the organization you work for. Another way to look at professionalism is via the old adage: treat others as you would like them to treat you.

Here are some examples.

- In a meeting, you listen to other's ideas and consider them, even if you don't agree with them. You don't ignore the ideas or, even worse, tell everyone how bad their ideas are.
- If you have been asked to participate in a project, and you just don't have the time to participate, don't say yes and then not participate. Be upfront and honest, telling the person you just don't have the time right now.
- You see a co-worker having a problem that you know how to solve. You volunteer to help out, sharing your knowledge. You don't let the co-worker fail when you could have helped.
- If a particular person in upper manager is an idiot, you don't need to share your feelings with others. Most people have probably figured it out for themselves.
- When your organization is going in a direction you feel is wrong, speak up! Offer well-considered opinions and options. If your opinions are ignored, go along with the new direction or find a new job; don't try to sabotage the project or talk badly about it to others.
- You dislike one of your co-workers, but instead of going after him or her, you try to reconcile your differences. If you can't, you still treat them with respect.

The examples could go on and on, but I think you understand how professionalism works. It's all a matter of respect.

Trustworthy

As a DBA, you are often privy to many company secrets. You have access to data that could damage individuals, or your organization, should it be made public. This knowledge carries with it a heavy responsibility. From the organization's point-of-view, it is your responsibility to protect it, insuring that only those who need access to the data have it. If the data is lawful then this is an easy responsibility to uphold. You just don't share it with any person who is not authorized to know about it.

On the other hand, you are bound by legal responsibilities outside of your organization. Although rare, you may, on occasion, discover data about unlawful activities. This may require you to investigate the best options you have available, such as contacting an attorney, asking advice from a trusted friend, or even quitting your job if aren't comfortable with the situation. You are not required to be a hero in these occasions, but you are expected to meet your legal obligations as a citizen.

Another aspect of being trustworthy is being honest. Just as you should be honest in your personal life, you also need to be honest in your work life. Yes, there can be justification for the occasional white lie (your boss's new outfit really looks cool), but when it comes to substantial issues, honestly is the only option. If you are asked how long it will take for a particular project to be completed, offer your honest advice. Don't tell the person what you think he wants to hear. If you are asked to do something you don't want to do, don't say you will, then not do it.

The Exceptional DBA needs to develop a reputation beyond reproach.

Dependable

Being dependable is much like being trustworthy. It is a sign of who you are and how you interact with others. Some examples include:

- **You do what you say you are going to do**. If something prevents you from doing what you said you would do, then you let the people involved know about it as soon as possible.
- **You do what you are expected to do**. If it is your responsibility, for example, to write a budget every fiscal year, then you perform that task as expected, and turn in the budget on time.
- **You are punctual**. You show up to work on time, and you show up to meetings on time.

Not only do you do the tasks you agreed to do, and are expected of you, but you do them well, and you complete your projects on time. The Exceptional DBA needs to have a least "four nines" dependability level, just as you expect your SQL Servers to have "four nines" up time, or more.

Can Work Well Independently or in a Team

As a DBA, you will sometimes work by yourself, and other times as part of a larger team. You need to be able to do both well, if you want to be an Exceptional DBA.

The Exceptional DBA will encounter many times when he or she works alone. This could include creating scripts, monitoring server performance, troubleshooting problems, or writing documentation. The Exceptional DBA is able to work quietly, alone, without the need to constantly interact with others.

Conversely, the Exceptional DBA will often work as part of a team. This might be a team of production DBAs who oversee a large SQL Server farm, or maybe the production DBA is part of a development team, creating an in-house application. In these cases, there will need to be a lot of communication by everyone on the team, in order for everything to run smoothly.

I would like to make a personal observation here. Many DBAs I know are…how can I say this politely…"independent" types. By being independent, I mean that they think they are smarter than most everyone else at their organization, and that only they know the best way to manage SQL Server, or to write SQL Server-based applications. While it is great to be a smart DBA, being a smart DBA does not make you an Exceptional DBA. By being independent, many DBAs sabotage their careers because they are not good team players.

Manages Time Well

The study of economics is all about learning how to find a balance between people who have unlimited needs and wants, and a physical world with only limited resources. The same can be said about the work of the DBA. Most organizations have a seemingly insatiable desire to assign DBAs (and all IT staff, for that matter) a huge amount of work. On the other hand,

the DBA only has a limited amount of time, and physical resources, in which to produce the work. The result can be a state of constant conflict between the DBA and the rest of the organization.

This situation is further complicated by the many warring factions within an organization, each one feeling that their needs are more important than the needs of other factions. For example, one project may need the use of two DBAs for six months, and another project may need a DBA for three months. If the organization only has two full time DBAs for all production and development work, this presents a problem. Technically speaking, it is up to the DBA's manager to find the right balance. However, in the real world, this often is not the case, and DBAs often ends up with more work that they can realistically accomplish.

There is no easy way to resolve this problem. Having a very understanding manager will help a lot, but the only real choice for the DBA is to be as efficient as he or she can be, making the most of the available time and resources. For example:

- By following **SQL Server best practices**, the DBA should be able to minimize the occurrence of performance issues and other SQL Server-related problems.
- By taking advantage of **third-party tools**, the DBA should be able to perform many routine tasks much faster than they could if performing them manually.
- By **minimizing participation in unnecessary meetings**, the DBA will have more time to do actual work.
- By becoming **more knowledgeable about SQL Server**, less time should be necessary to perform many tasks, or to troubleshoot problems when they do occur.
- By **scheduling tasks and projects**, the DBA knows what has to be done, and can better juggle tasks when necessary.

The Exceptional DBA realizes that he or she can only offer a finite amount of work in a given amount of time. To maximize the work-to-time ratio, the Exceptional DBA carefully manages time, focusing on what is important and ignoring what is unimportant. He or she also looks for every possible way to extend their capacity to work, by making full use of productivity tools.

Can Communicate Effectively, Both Orally and Verbally

Whether you like it or not, DBAs must be effective communicators. Unfortunately, the art of good communication is not taught in most schools, and many DBAs find themselves in uncomfortable positions because of their lack of communication skills. Here are some examples of where good communications skills are needed by the DBA:

- Making a PowerPoint presentation at a group meeting.
- Convincing your manager that a SQL Server needs more RAM.
- Writing hardware specifications for a new SQL Server.
- As a DBA consultant, making a sales presentation to a potential client.
- Writing a proposal to purchase a third-party tool to administer your SQL Servers.
- Documenting SQL Server development best practices for use by developers.
- Writing a disaster recovery document.
- Creating and writing a budget proposal.
- Teaching an in-house class to other DBAs or developers.
- Speaking at a conference or user's group meeting.
- Sharing information in a public forum.
- Writing a SQL Server or personal blog.
- Writing articles for SQL Server community website and publications.
- Writing a resume.

While a typical DBA may not participate in all of the above activities, the Exceptional DBA often participates in all of them, and more. Becoming an effective communicator is one of the secrets of becoming an Exceptional DBA. After all, if you can't communicate how good you are to others, how can you ever be recognized as an Exceptional DBA?

Listens Well

An important part of becoming a good communicator is being a good listener. Many people confuse "hearing" with "listening." To listen well means not only to hear what the person is saying, but also to understand *what* the person is saying, and *why* they are saying it. Consider the following four examples.

Example1: A user calls up and tells you that SQL Server is down. If that is all you heard, and you don't ask any questions, you would hang up and then go check out the server to see why it is down. When I hear such a comment, I automatically assume that the user is not telling me everything, so I ask follow-up questions. For example, I might ask: Can you tell me what is not working? What application are you using? When did the problem first occur? Instead of just acting blindly on the information you hear, ask questions, dig deeper and make sure you really understand what they the user is trying to say.

Example 2: For the third time in a week, a new employee calls you up, asking when his SQL Server user ID and password will be effective. And for the third time you tell him that he is set up and can log in. Again, he says that he can't log in. If all you do is repeat yourself each time the user asks the same question, the odds are that you won't solve the problem. Again, you must ask very specific questions so that you fully understand the user's situation. For example, ask the user exactly what screen he is at. Ask what is on the screen. Ask him what he is typing in, and in what parts of the screen. Or if you have to, visit the user and watch him try to log in. The problem could be that he is at the wrong screen, or he is using all uppercase letters, or perhaps he was given an incorrect password. Who knows, unless you take the effort to get to the real cause of the problem?

Example 3: Your manager tells you that you will be reassigned to the development department for a new project, and to show up next week to see the new project manager. If that is all you hear, and know, this can create a lot of anxiety for you, as you don't know what is really going on. To find out, ask questions, find out why you are being reassigned, for how long, and when you will be going back to your regular duties. If you are still worried about this move once you've find out the details, then let your manager know that you are apprehensive and ask even more questions in order to resolve the issue.

Example 4: You are a consultant and are talking with end users, finding out what their needs are. If all you hear is that they need some sales reports, this is not very useful. You need to know exactly what data they need, where the data is at, how often they need the data, how the data will be used, and on and on. The more specific the questions, the better the answers will be. I am sure you know of many cases where the needs of users have not been met by developers because the developers never really listened to what the users wanted in the first place.

Exceptional DBAs know that what people say is not always what they really mean. They make an extra effort to make sure they really understand what the person needs, and then take the appropriate action. Keep in mind that not everyone is a good communicator, and that you may often have to help others communicate with you.

Realistic

I have seen this over and over again in my career. A new DBA starts with a company, all gung-ho about making his or her mark. He offers lots of ideas and advice, but nobody really listens, and he eventually becomes discouraged. Eventually, he either ends up quitting and finding different work, or staying and ending up like Wally, the cynical engineer in the Dilbert comic strip.

In another case, I know of a DBA who expected everybody to do things his way. When this did not work out for him, he blamed the organization and his co-workers. As far as he was concerned, everyone else was the root cause of his problems. He became a complainer and whiner, and nobody wanted to work with him.

DBAs must have realistic expectations about their job, and they must come to grips with the reality that no job will meet all of their expectations. Not even self-employment will necessarily meet 100% of one's expectations. Every job has its good and bad points. The Exceptional DBA understands this and accepts it. When things don't work out as planned, the Exceptional DBA learns from the situation and moves on. I don't necessarily mean moving to another job, just moving on with their job and life in general, and not letting small problems become big problems.

Of course, there will be cases when a job is so bad that you have no choice but to leave, but this is rare, assuming you had realistic expectations in the first place. If you find that you are bouncing from one job to another, you may want to reevaluate your job expectations, and try to make them a little more realistic.

Flexible

Being flexible in your approach to your job is really just an extension of being realistic about your job. In other words, the job of the DBA changes over time, and you have to be flexible and be willing to change as the job changes.

The following are fairly typical examples of where some flexibility is required on the behalf of the DBA:

- You have been hired to work on DBA development projects, but the needs of the organization have changed and now you are needed to do production DBA work instead.
- You are used to managing 50 SQL Servers, but then another DBA quits and the company needs to cut back on operating expenses, so they do not refill the position. You end up managing 100 SQL Servers.
- Your manager asks you to create a BI application. This is something that you have never done before, but the company can't justify the cost of hiring a consultant, so you have been elected.

Flexibility is important on a day-to-day basis, as well as when dealing with the "bigger" changes. For example, when you came to work today, you had planned on writing some needed documentation, but instead you find out that you needed to help a developer tune a poorly-performing query. Or maybe you had planned on installing a new SQL Server, but a blocking problem arises that you need to investigate right away, because users are complaining about not getting their work done.

In short, the Exceptional DBA realizes that things change, and that he or she has to adapt to the situation at hand.

Patient

It takes a half hour for the new service pack to install. It takes six minutes to reboot the server. The query takes 16 minutes to run before it finishes. It takes an hour to explain to a new developer the organization's best practices for writing stored procedures. The backup takes four hours to complete.

The DBA is often faced with one request after another, often in a rapid-fire sort of way. On the other hand, many DBA tasks take time, lots of time, wasted time. Sometimes the waiting can be used to perform other tasks, and other times it can't. However you look at it, DBAs end up spending a lot of time waiting for something to happen before they can proceed with their next task.

The Exceptional DBA learns to be a patient person, to expect that tasks will take longer than they had hoped. Moreover, they build this into their schedules, as they are realistic and know that waiting is just a part of the job of the DBA. Exceptional DBAs also take this time to relax, to find a little quiet time out of an often-turbulent day.

Enthusiastic

All of the Exceptional DBAs I know have a passion for their jobs. The really enjoy their work, and it is a big part of their lives. The reasons they are passionate vary widely. It may be because they enjoy technology, or because they feel they are providing a worthwhile service in the marketplace. It may be that they like to share their knowledge with others, or like to be creative in their work. It may be because they work for a great organization or have great co-workers. Each Exceptional DBA has their own reasons why they enjoy their work, making it hard to describe all of them here.

Not only does enthusiasm help a DBA become an Exceptional DBA, being an Exceptional DBA helps fuel even more enthusiasm. This is a positive feedback loop than can contribute to a very rewarding, lifelong career.

Self-Confident

Self-confidence helps the Exceptional DBA reach his or her goals, and is also the reward that the Exceptional DBA receives for a job well done. If you are seeking to become an Exceptional DBA, you need to start out with clear, simple goals. Once you have attained these, you can set yourself additional, more difficult goals. If you proceed slowly like this, you will begin to develop more confidence in your abilities. Moreover, the more self-confidence you gain, the easier it will be for you to continue on your path to becoming an Exceptional DBA.

Summary: Assess your Strengths and Weaknesses

Now that you seen the characteristics that define most Exceptional DBAs, how well do you measure up? Do you know what your strengths and weakness are? While some people will be able to make a mental tally of where they stand, others may prefer to write then down on paper. For example, take a piece of paper and draw a line down the center of it. On the left hand side write your strengths, and on the right hand side write down your weaknesses.

Once you are done with your assessment, consider which characteristics are your strengths, which ones need work, and which ones you might consider skipping. Remember, most Exceptional DBAs have taken many years to develop these characteristics, and that not all Exceptional DBAs have all these strengths.

In later chapters, we will talk more about how you can develop these strengths, including what actions you can take to attain specific goals.

CHAPTER3: SPECIALIZE (YOU CAN'T DO IT ALL)

In this chapter, we are going to look at the many different types of job functions that a DBA might be asked to perform. The list is a long one, and if you look around DBA job postings you'll notice that there are almost as many different specifications for a DBA's job as there are DBAs.

Very few DBAs can master every potential facet of SQL Server, so the Exceptional DBA will generally choose to specialize in certain areas. Later in this chapter, we'll take a look at the different areas in which a DBA might decide to focus.

What Exactly is a DBA?

A DBA (Database Administrator) is an IT Professional who is responsible for the ongoing operations of an organization's databases and the applications that access the databases. The position encompasses many different job functions and job titles, and these vary widely from one organization to the next. In short, there is no "standard job description" to which a DBA can refer. This is partly because the job title of DBA doesn't have a long history, and partly because the functions of the DBA are quickly evolving.

If you were to ask ten different DBAs what their duties were, you would get ten different answers. In one job, the organization may need a DBA to manage existing SQL Server instances, while another organization may want a Transact-SQL and C# developer, another might want an SSIS expert, while another may be want a DBA who knows how to design databases.

Unfortunately, many advertised DBA positions don't list the required skills, making it hard for you to decide if a particular DBA-type job opening will meet your interests and skill set. This happens in large part because there is poor communication between the person doing the hiring and the person writing the job ad. If you are not sure what skills an organization is looking for, you may want to call or e-mail the organization for more information. There is no point in applying for a job that doesn't meet your job skills or interests.

This happened to me once. I applied for a job for what appeared to be a production DBA, doing exactly the kind of work I had been doing. After applying and then going in for an interview, I was asked about all kinds of aspects of DBA work that I was not particularly familiar with. After about thirty minutes of being interviewed, I told the interviewer that the job, as described in the interview, did not meet my job skills or interests. If I had only spent a little more time asking questions upfront, I would have saved myself a lot of wasted time.

An A-to-Z of Typical DBA Tasks

DBAs perform many different tasks. So many, in fact, that it is hard to categorize them all. Below, I have compiled a list, in alphabetical order, of some of the more common tasks you find DBAs performing. This list is by no means comprehensive. My goal is to cover the most common tasks so that you are familiar with them, and can better understand what DBAs do. Also, keep in mind that many of these job functions overlap.

Archiving Data

Data grows over time and can become costly to store and difficult to manage. In addition, having more data tends to exasperate performance problems. As a DBA, you must monitor data size and growth, and determine the best way to store it. In some cases, this may include archiving seldom-used data in another database or server, or it might even mean purging data that is no longer needed.

Often you will find that your choices are limited, as company policy and government regulations can restrict how and where you store data.

Attending Meetings

Most DBAs I know hate attending meetings because they can't use that time to do the work they really like, or need, to do. However, meetings are a fact of working life and, if used wisely, aren't necessarily a waste of time. With correct planning and preparation, meetings are great opportunities for improving communications.

Auditing

An emerging task of the DBA is to identify which users are accessing, inserting, updating, or deleting data, and when. Auditing might only be necessary for limited time periods, or for very specific data, or it might be required 24/7 for all data. While performing this task, DBAs often have to work with people outside their organization, such as external auditors.

Application Integration

While most organizations use third-party applications, very few of these applications work in isolation. In other words, disparate applications have to be made to talk to one another, often using the database as the means to share data. DBAs often get involved in figuring out the best way to integrate applications.

Backup and Recovery

One of the most fundamental aspects of the DBA's job is to protect the organization's data. This includes making periodic backups of data and keeping it safe from accidental or intentional destruction. In addition, a well-developed recovery plan needs to be implemented and tested so that when problems do arise, data can be restored quickly.

Business Intelligence/Data Warehousing

Another emerging trend is for DBAs to be tasked with the creation and maintenance of data warehouses and business intelligence applications, so organizations can make better use of their data. This area has become so complex that many DBAs specialize just in this one discipline.

Capacity Planning

In most organizations, the number and size of databases grows rapidly. It is the responsibility of the DBA to watch data growth, and plan how best to deal with it. This may include archiving it, increasing the size of current hardware, or adding new hardware.

Database Application Development

Many DBAs are really application developers who specialize in writing code to directly access SQL Server. While this is most commonly done using Transact-SQL and stored procedures, it could also involve writing other code that is used to access SQL Server data. Many DBAs decide to make this their area of specialty, because a wide breadth of knowledge is required to be a good database applications developer.

Data Modeling and Database Design

The foundation of all efficient and scalable databases is good design. DBAs often create database designs by performing needs/requirements analysis, creating a logical model, and then implementing the physical model. In larger organizations, there may be DBAs who specialize in database design.

Developing and Maintaining Best Practices

Exceptional DBAs are proactive in their work, and one of the best ways to be proactive is to develop sound database best practices and to implement them. The better organized and managed the database operations, the more efficient they will be.

High Availability

A DBA needs to ensure that his or her databases are available to users when they need access to data. There are many different ways to help ensure high availability, including use of log shipping, clustering, database mirroring, and other technologies. Because of the very specialized knowledge required for high availability techniques, many DBAs focus in this area.

Installing, Configuring, and Upgrading SQL Server Software

One of the most time-consuming of all database tasks is installing, configuring, and upgrading SQL Server instances. While it might sound like an easy task, it isn't. The biggest difficulty is in finding a good time to perform such work. In addition, each time SQL Server is patched or upgraded, there is the risk that the database might not work properly afterwards. This requires that lots of testing and backout planning, before implementing major changes.

Installing and Configuring Hardware

In some organizations, hardware is handled by dedicated hardware technicians. In others, the DBA is responsible for building, installing, and configuring their own hardware. In addition, DBAs may also perform regular hardware troubleshooting and maintenance.

Load Balancing

Over time, the load put on individual databases changes. DBAs are responsible for monitoring workloads and figuring out how to maximize hardware resources to get the best SQL Server performance. This may involve moving a database from a busy server to a less busy server.

Maintaining Documentation

Writing and maintaining documentation is probably the most boring, and loathed task that a DBA will encounter. However boring it is, it is a critical part of the DBA's job. If you don't document, then there is no easy way to rebuild the current infrastructure should major problems arise.

Managing People

Many DBAs find themselves in management positions, such as a senior DBA who is in charge of junior DBAs. Some DBAs at large organizations do this full time, while others combine people management with other DBA duties.

Managing SQL Server-based Applications

New DBAs are often surprised to learn that not only are they responsible for managing SQL Server and its databases, but also any applications that access the database. These varies by organization, but in some places the DBA ends up spending more time managing applications than SQL Server itself.

Managing Test Environments

In most, larger organizations, DBAs manage test environments that include test SQL Servers and test databases as well as test database applications. The purpose of this is to allow

applications (both in-house and third-party) to be tested before new versions of either the application or SQL Server are rolled out.

Monitoring

This is a wide-ranging task that includes many subtasks, such as monitoring performance, monitoring server disk space, monitoring logs, ensuring jobs have run successfully, checking for errors, and so on. While there are many third-party tools available to perform these tasks, many DBAs spend a lot of time manually monitoring their servers, because they don't have a budget for such tools, or they are not familiar with them.

Needs/Requirements Analysis

Whether a DBA is involved in development, or just supports third-party applications, they often get involved in needs/requirements analysis. This can include talking to users, finding out their needs and requirements, and determining the best way to meet them.

Performance Tuning

Everyone wants their data right now, not caring about other users. It is the job of the DBA to monitor performance and to determine ways to optimize database performance. This can be a very complex topic, and many DBAs specialize in this area.

Project Management

Oftentimes, DBAs will find themselves in charge of a large project involving many other people. This could entail writing a new in-house application, or managing the migration of a data center from one location to another. DBAs with good project management skills are in high demand.

Protector of the Data

While this is not a specific job task, I am including it here because it underlies so many of the DBA's other tasks. DBAs are responsible for protecting the integrity of the organizations data. This involves such obvious areas as back and restore, and high availability, and also includes ensuring that applications don't corrupt data, that hardware doesn't corrupt data, or that user's don't corrupt data.

Report Writing

With the advent of SQL Server Reporting Services, many DBAs find themselves writing reports against databases. This might just mean writing the Transact-SQL code to extract the data, or it could include the creation and formatting of physical reports. This is a new and growing area, and some DBAs are becoming specialists in it.

Running Jobs

Virtually every SQL Server has jobs that run on it periodically. These jobs might include backups, data imports or exports, or rebuilding indexes. DBAs are responsible for determining what jobs are needed, creating the jobs, and managing them.

Security

DBAs control who can access data and what they can do with it. This involves creating SQL Server login IDs, database IDs, assigning permissions, moving security between servers, and implementing data encryption.

Scripting

DBAs often write their own Transact-SQL scripts to perform a wide range of tasks, including monitoring and maintenance tasks. In addition, with the advent of PowerShell, many DBAs are writing PowerShell scripts to enhance their productivity.

SSIS/ETL

A very common task is to move data in and out of databases, and at the same time perform some transformations on the data as it is moved. This is often done for data warehouses and application integration.

Testing

DBAS perform all sorts of testing, all the time. It can include testing servers, testing databases, testing applications, testing management tools, and so on. DBAs test because they want to ensure that they do will work and will maintain data integrity.

Training Users

Oftentimes, DBAs have to share their knowledge with other DBAs, developers, or end-users. This might be informal one-on-one tutoring, or it might include classroom training.

Troubleshooting

Virtually every day, DBAs are troubleshooting one problem or another. In many cases, when a problem occurs the DBA is expected to "drop everything" and focus on resolving the problem at hand.

Working with Teammates

Rarely will a DBA work alone. In most cases, DBAs will be interacting with a very large group of people, including other DBAs, developers, end-users, product-knowledge specialists, vendors, accountants, hardware experts, and networking experts.

Choosing a Specialty

As you can see, DBAs perform many different functions. While you may find specialist DBAs who focus in particular areas, it is rare to find a DBA that performs all of the tasks listed above.

The reason it is rare to find a DBA who can perform every type of DBA function is because it requires knowing way more than you can expect of most people. There is also the added burden of having to keep up with each technology as it changes. For most people, this is impossible. To become an Exceptional DBA, you don't have to know everything there is about SQL Server. In fact, you have a much better chance of becoming an Exceptional DBA if you narrow your focus and specialize in a single area of SQL Server.

When I recommend that you pick a DBA specialty, I don't mean that you only focus on your specialty to the exclusion of all other DBA functions. It is still important for a DBA, especially for the Exceptional DBA, to be familiar with other DBA areas. This rounded knowledge base helps the DBA be aware of other areas that may directly impact his or her specialty.

In the following sections, I describe some of the more common "specialist areas" as a guide to get you thinking about the options available to you.

DBA System Administrator

The DBA System Administrator is a generalist, needing sound knowledge of many different areas. Also known as a Production DBA, the DBA System Administrator is generally in charge of setting up, configuring, and maintaining test and production SQL Server instances. This can include such routine tasks as monitoring, tuning, backups and restores, security, creating jobs, and so on. In medical terms, think of the DBA System Administrator as the General Practice doctor. All of the other DBA specialties are more like the medical specialists, such as a surgeon or dermatologist.

DBA Database Designer

The DBA Database Designer focuses on creating new database schemas. He defines user needs and requirements, develops logical database designs, creates physical databases, and so on. In most cases, the DBA Database Designer will work with DBA Developers, or other developers, to help develop or maintain applications.

DBA Developer

The DBA Developer writes code, be that Transact-SQL scripts, stored procedures, functions, CLR objects, or any other kind of code that is used to access SQL Server data. Often, the DBA Developer will work with DBA System Administrators, DBA Database Designers, Project Managers, and other developers to develop and maintain applications.

DBA High Availability Specialist

For many of today's online businesses, it is more critical than ever that SQL Server is available "around the clock". Therefore, there has become a need for DBAs who specialize in high availability. Their job is to determine what high availability methods are best for their environment, and then to implement and maintain them.

DBA Business Intelligence Specialist

DBA Business Intelligence Specialists design, create, and maintain data warehouses and OLAP cubes so that data can more easily be retrieved and analyzed by organizations. This often involves developing BI-based application, written using MDX queries. They also design or configure Business Intelligence tools for use by end-users.

DBA Report Writer

In the past, the DBA Report Writer has often been lumped with the Business Intelligence Specialist. However, SQL Server Reporting Services has evolved enough now that many DBAs are needed just to design and create reports in order to extract data from databases in meaningful formats.

Summary: Specialize but be Adaptable

Given that the DBA job description is so varied, and constantly changing, it is hard to list all the possible DBA specialties on which you might want to focus, so don't consider the above lists to be anything more than a guide.

You may find that you want to develop your own specialty, one that is even more focused than the broad specializations I've described in this chapter. For example, maybe you want to focus on performance tuning, clustering, SSIS, or replication. There is nothing preventing you from specializing as much as you like, other than the fact that the more narrow your specialty, the less jobs you will find.

While I highly suggest you select a specialty and become very good at it, I want to end this chapter with two thoughts about specialization. First, business needs change. In other words, over time the demand for DBA specialties changes. Therefore, you may need to periodically review your specialty to determine whether or not there is still a strong market need for it. If the need for your specialty is declining, then you will need to move to a different one. For example, how many people still make a living writing dBase applications?

Second, over time, your interests may change. You may decide that, after specializing in one particular area for five years, you need a "change of scenery". Very few people are interested in staying in the exact same job for their entire career. Don't be afraid to change specialties when the time is right.

CHAPTER 4: HONE YOUR SKILL SET

Chapter 3 took an "A-to-Z" tour of typical technical tasks that the DBA might be expected to undertake. However, becoming an Exceptional DBA involves many skills, not just mastering the technical aspects of SQL Server.

In this chapter, we examine the various ingredients that will help you establish a career as a DBA and then contribute to your long-term success as an Exceptional DBA. These ingredients include:

- **Formal Education** – you don't need a degree in database administration, but a solid computer technology background will help.
- **Getting Experience** – getting experience as a new DBA can be tough, but it can be done.
- **Technical skills** – sound knowledge of SQL Server is not enough on its own; the DBA needs to understand the underlying operating system and hardware, as well as the productivity tools that are available to them.
- **Soft Skills** – the DBA needs to supplement sound technical skills with excellent teamwork, time management, writing skills, and more.

Where Does Formal Education Fit In?

I frequently get asked whether or not you need a formal degree to become a DBA. While having a formal degree is not mandatory for becoming an Exceptional DBA, it is a great start.

Higher Education

Very few universities offer an Associates, Bachelors, or Masters degree in database administration. Those that do tend to be on-line schools, or technical schools, not the typical university most students attend. I believe the reason for the lack of database administration degrees in most schools is twofold. First, the market for database administrators is smaller than most other educational markets. Second, very few people come out of high (secondary) school wanting to become a database administrator. In a perfect world, a degree in database administration would be an ideal platform from which to embark on a DBA career. The reality is that there are few of these educational opportunities available.

Therefore, the most common approach people take to prepare for a career as a database administrator (either through foresight or dumb luck) is to get a degree in Computer Science or Management Information Systems, which includes database-specific courses. In fact, when many people attend a university to attain one of these degrees, they are not aware that the career of DBA even exists, and first discover databases when taking database theory classes as part of their degree program. Such a degree provides a rounded education in computer technology and provides a great foundation for becoming a DBA.

The truth is that most people don't go to college to become a database administrator, or even to work in the technology field, so they get Bachelors degrees in other subjects, ranging anywhere from English to Business, or from Art to Math. It is not until after they enter the workforce that they realize they are interested in computer technology, or becoming a database professional.

Many people wind up as database administrators through a set of often-random circumstances. Many DBAs don't have degrees in computer technology, and I am one of them. I have a Bachelors degree in both Economics and Business Administration, and a Masters Degree in Business Administration.

While a bachelors degree in a non-computer technology field may not be as ideal a foundation as having a degree in a computer technology, it can still provide a rounded education that people can leverage to reach whatever goals that interest them. My degrees in

Economics and Business Administration actually helped my computer career a lot. As I had a good understanding of accounting and how businesses worked, I was much better equipped to work in the real world than most newly minted programmers.

The main point I would make is that, while an IT-related degree is probably the best preparation for a DBA career, don't be discouraged if you have a different background. Focus on the advantages this offers you, be prepared to teach yourself the skills you need, and look out for opportunities.

During my degree, I learned BASIC, and later taught some BASIC programming classes at a local community college. My first IT job after graduation was as a computer salesperson and trainer (an odd combination indeed) at one of the first computer stores opened in the United States. I got the job because I owned an IBM PC, which was a rare tool for most people to own at that time, and because of my teaching experience. After that, I began writing about computer technology, and then moved through a wide range of computer-related jobs, ranging from application development, software support, network administration, and full-time trainer, before finally arriving at database administrator.

Employer Expectations

Now, let's talk a little about what employers expect when it comes to formal education. Whether you agree or not, a Bachelors degree is becoming the minimum educational credential for most any type of professional job. Many companies won't even consider someone for a job unless they have at least four years of higher education. It's a fine line though: a two-year degree is generally not considered an adequate substitute for a four-year degree, but a Masters degree can often make a person seem to be over-educated for most jobs (unless the job specifically requires a Masters degree as the minimum educational requirement). This makes the standard four-year Bachelors degree the best route for most people. I only got my Masters degree because I wanted to be able to teach at the college level, and this requires a Masters degree at the very minimum.

If you look at job-wanted ads for database professionals, you will find that most employers want someone who has a four-year computer technology degree, or equivalent. In other words, they prefer someone who has a computer technology education, but they are willing to accept someone with any four-year degree if they meet the other skills and experience required by the position. If you are starting out in your career, and want to become a database professional, the more closely aligned your education is to computer technology, the easier it will be to find related jobs.

How about those people who don't have a four-year degree? Is it possible for them to become database professionals? Yes, but it is tougher. I know DBAs who have not attended a university, or perhaps attended for a while, but never attained a degree. These people often start with companies in a low-level computer technology job, such as working the help desk. Then, through self-study, on-the-job training, and experience, they eventually move into the DBA role.

Most of these individuals stay with a single company as they develop their skills. Once they have developed a lot of experience as a DBA, they can move to other companies, who are willing to waive the four-year degree minimum requirement in return for the hands-on experience that they offer. Of course, some companies won't waive this requirement, and so certain job opportunities will remain closed to non-degree candidates.

Switching Careers

Up until this point, we have been considering formal university training at the beginning of one's career. What if you already have an IT career, but want to switch to become a database professional? For example, maybe you are a developer who wants to stop writing code and focus on database administration. How does formal education fit into this scenario? If you already have a computer technology-related degree, you are in good shape. All you need to do

is gain specific database-related skills and experience. If you have a non-technology-related degree, and you have lots of technology experience (say you have been a network administrator for three years or more), you are also in good shape for making the transition, if you attain the necessary DBA skills.

If you don't have a technology-related degree, or technology-related work experience, then changing careers to become a database professional is more problematic. In this regard, it is as if you are starting from scratch. You might want to consider going back to school (part- or full-time) to get a degree in computer technology or database administration (where available). If you already have a degree, getting a second degree should be much faster.

Getting Experience

While a good and relevant formal education is an excellent first step to becoming an Exceptional DBA, it is just a start. Universities generally only cover database theory, not specific database skills. Even if you were to graduate from a university with a Masters degree in database administration, you won't be prepared for the day-to-day work as a DBA. Learning the practical side of being a DBA takes additional technical knowledge and a lot of practical *experience*.

In almost every job ad you see for a DBA, experience is required. So how do you get your first job as a DBA if you don't have any experience as a DBA, and how can you get experience as a DBA if you can't get a job as a DBA in the first place? Most new job seekers face this same dilemma, especially if they are looking for professional-caliber jobs. So what do you do?

One option is to apply for DBA jobs that don't require experience. If you have training as a DBA, and have a degree or certification to verify your credentials, then some companies will hire you. DBAs are in such high demand now that some companies hire DBAs without experience. If the company is large, they may even offer a training program to get you started out right.

However, the fact remains that most people who become new DBAs are promoted to that position from another position within the company they currently work for. In other words, they have been working for a company for some time in some computer-related position, have a good track record, and have expressed an interest in becoming a DBA. Oftentimes, if a company cannot find an experienced DBA to fill a position, they will recruit from within, and train the person for the job. That is what I did, along with many of the DBAs I know.

However, what if you are working for a company that doesn't have a DBA position open? Or maybe the company is too small to need a full-time DBA. What do you do then? One option would be to identify any DBA-type work done within your current company and volunteer to do it as part of your regular job. This will start getting you hands-on DBA experience, even if it is only on a part-time basis. If your current job does not afford you the opportunity to gain any DBA experience, you may have to consider changing jobs, and finding a company where DBA opportunities exist. It is either this option, or trying to find a job that will hire a DBA without experience.

What if you can't change jobs right now, and don't have any opportunities to get any practical DBA experience? At this point, you are running out of options. You might contact non-profit organizations and volunteer your services, or you might attend a local SQL Server user's group and ask the members for their suggestions on how you can get experience in your local area.

However you gain your DBA experience, you will find that it is the most important asset you can have.

Mastering DBA Technical Skills

Once you have embarked on your new career as a DBA, you need to quickly master the practical technical skills that will allow you to succeed in the job. In this section, we take a broad look at the specific kinds of technical skills you need to become an Exceptional DBA, along with suggestions on how to attain them.

Specialized Database Skills

As we discussed in Chapter 2, it is virtually impossible for anyone to know everything there is to know about databases. Because of this, I suggested that you specialize in an area that interests you. This might be DBA System Administration, DBA Database Designer, DBA Development, DBA Business Intelligence, among others.

The key to becoming an Exceptional DBA is to select a specialty, and then master all the technical information related to it. For example, if you want to become a DBA System Administrator, you need to learn about how the database engine works, how to perform routine maintenance tasks, how to performance tune, how to troubleshoot problems, and so on. Pick whatever DBA specialty interests you, and make it a point to master it, inside and out. If you don't know what specialty to pick, I recommend you start as a DBA System Administrator. As you begin to master these skills, you will also be learning about the other specialties, and you can always change specialties anytime you want.

Hardware

Not only is the Exceptional DBA an expert in their chosen SQL Server specialty, they are also very knowledgeable about the physical computer hardware on which SQL Server runs. Getting the best performance and scalability out of SQL Server requires DBAs to know how to select the optimum hardware for their SQL Server. In addition, hardware skills are necessary for knowing how to best configure the hardware, along with how to diagnose and troubleshoot hardware-related problems. Exceptional DBAs don't depend on others to figure out problems with their servers.

Operating System

Another critical component the Exceptional DBA needs to understand is the operating system. It is fully intertwined with SQL Server and the physical hardware, and can't be separated. The DBA needs to know how to install it, configure it, manage it, and troubleshoot it. Many problems that are associated with SQL Server are operating-system related, and the Exceptional DBA needs to understand its intricacies in order to resolve them.

Productivity Tools

Whatever database specialty you choose, you will have both built-in and third-party tools available to help you do your job and be more productive. In my experience, many DBAs don't take the time to learn how to master the tools available to them. This means they end up being less proficient and productive at their work.

Not only does the Exceptional DBA master all the tools included with SQL Server, he also learns about related third-party tools that can help him become more productive. This means they often are downloading new tools, and trying them out, seeing if they help them do a better job.

SQL Server Best Practices

In addition to the raw technical knowledge that a DBA requires, in order to know how to perform specific tasks with SQL Server, there is an additional layer of knowledge that Exceptional DBAs must gain, and that is SQL Server Best Practices. As a DBA, you are often

many faced with many different ways to perform the same task. Some of the options are better than others, especially if you factor in the requirements of a specific situation. Best Practices refers to the best way to perform a specific task, given the circumstances you are facing. For example, there are different ways to back up and restore databases. The best way to do this often depends on the situation.

Unfortunately, most SQL Server Best Practices have not been codified anywhere. Instead, you have to search them out from books, articles, and websites. In other cases, you have to learn them by trial and error. The Exceptional DBA often develops his or her own set of Best Practices and uses them in their day to day work, helping not only to bring consistency to their work, but also to help perform their job better and more efficiently.

How to Obtain DBA Technical Skills

As you can see, Exceptional DBAs need to have a wide variety of technical skills. So how do they attain them? It really comes down to making time to do so; both time for learning and time for gaining experience. As discussed earlier, a DBA needs many technical skills that won't generally be taught at a university. Instead, most Exceptional DBAs master technical skills by using one or more of the methods detailed below.

An Exceptional DBA will probably use all of these training methods at one time or another. You may find that some are better suited to you than others. It really doesn't make much difference which option you choose, as long as you take the time to learn. Mastering the technical skills to become an Exceptional DBA is your responsibility. In other words, you have to design your own education program. Nobody is going to do it for you. Yes, you can get some help by taking a series of related courses, such as certification courses (see Chapter 5), but that is just a beginning. You need to decide what you need to know to meet the educational needs of your DBA specialty, and decide how you are going to acquire those skills.

Formal Classroom Training

Formal classroom training is offered by corporate training companies, and some colleges and universities (usually non-credit), and is one of the fastest ways to master multiple technical skills, including SQL Server, hardware, and the operating system. Many of these classes are called certification classes because the assumption is that once you take the class then you should be ready to take the related certification test, assuming you want to become certified. While these can be expensive, they are an effective way to learn a lot of information very quickly, especially if the subject matter is new to you.

Seminars and Workshops

These are training sessions that last one day, or less, and focus on a very specific topic. Generally speaking, these are best for people who already have some background in the subject matter and are looking for more in-depth knowledge of a particular subject.

Conferences

Conferences encompass many different learning formats, including formal classroom training, half-day and one-day workshops, short (60-90 minute) seminars, hands-on training labs, and general sessions. They even offer opportunities to ask database experts specific questions about any topic you want to learn more about, on a one-on-one basis. If you are a new DBA, conferences can be a little overwhelming, but educational. In many cases, you will see experienced DBAs attending conferences not only to learn something new, but to network and make new connections.

On-line Training

Learning over the Internet is becoming more and more common, but the cost and the quality of the learning varies substantially. In some cases, you can take free lessons that range from average to exceptional in quality, and in other cases you can pay a lot of money for mediocre to exceptional training. If you intend to pay a lot of money for on-line training, be sure you carefully check out the company first before you send them your money.

Self-Study Booking Learning

One of the most popular ways to master SQL Server technical skills is to read books. There are books on virtually every topic and at most every learning level. Books allow you to choose when you learn, but on the other hand, you have to be disciplined enough to take book learning seriously if you want to get the most out of your time.

Magazines and other Publications

There are few technical magazines or publications that focus on SQL Server, or databases for that matter. Of those that are available, they are most useful for keeping up with SQL Server news and third-party products, but they are not always the best way to learn new skills.

Websites, Blogs, News, RSS Feeds

By contrast, there are many different websites and blogs devoted to SQL Server. Unfortunately, the quality of the content varies widely, and much of it can be out of date. This means that you may have to spend a little extra time searching for SQL Server-related websites and articles that cover the specific material you want to master. Many DBAs consider this type of learning as "just-in-time" learning. In other words, if you need to learn a specific skill or task very quickly, then the Internet is often the quickest way to find the content and to learn it.

On the Job Training Opportunities

If you work for a larger organization, they may offer on-the-job learning opportunities, including formal instruction and mentoring. If you have these options are available, you will want to take advantage of them.

Mastering DBA Soft Skills

If you want to become an Exceptional DBA, not only do you need exceptional technical skills, you also need to master many soft skills. Yes, I know what you are thinking. You are thinking that if you are a technical wiz, you don't need soft skills. Unfortunately, that's not the case. As we discussed earlier in the book, Exceptional DBAs have many traits that fall into the soft skills category.

The following sections describe some of the numerous types of soft skills that the Exceptional DBA should master.

People Skills

While this phrase may be overused, it is overused with much justification. While DBAs may find themselves working alone more than other professionals do, they still need to work with others. This includes talking with end-users, developers, IT professional, and managers. If you don't get along well with others, you will severely reduce your chances of becoming an Exceptional DBA, or even of having a long career as a DBA.

If you don't naturally have people skills, learning them can be difficult, but you do have some options available to you. You might consider reading books on people skills, taking classes or

seminars, or even individual counseling. While people skills may be hard to learn, learning them will pay off for your entire life.

Teamwork Skills

I consider teamwork skills to be a little different from people skills, although there is a lot of overlap. People skills are about getting along well with others. Teamwork skills are about learning how to work well with others. Many times, you find yourself in a team of people that you did not pick, and would not pick if you had a choice. Teamwork skills are learning how to work effectively in a team, even if you don't like each other!

As a part of a team, you might be the leader (also requiring leadership and project management skills), or you may be a contributor, who is assigned a task that needs to be completed. Whatever role you fall in, you need to participate and work together as a team to accomplish the task successfully and on schedule.

If you have difficulty with teamwork skills then, first, be sure you have good people skills. Once you have accomplished this, then focus on building teamwork skills. There are many books and seminars available on building and managing teams. In fact, your organization might even offer one in-house. If so, jump at the first opportunity at taking it.

Personal Time Management Skills

Most Exceptional DBAs have more work than they have time to accomplish. To get everything done, the DBA needs to be effective at managing his of her time. It is very easy to just sit back and have work come to you, pile up, with much of it never getting done. Instead, you must be proactive when managing your time. Keep a schedule and assign priorities to tasks so you can ensure that what has to get done gets done, on time, and successfully. Don't be afraid to say "no" to new tasks if you don't have the time to do them right.

If you have trouble managing your own time, start small by using a schedule, making appointments for yourself to ensure work gets done. Using Microsoft Outlook, or a similar tool, is a great way to track tasks, appointments, meetings, and other things you need to accomplish. If this doesn't work for you, there are many books and seminars available on personal time management.

Project Management

If you want to be an Exceptional DBA, you will find yourself managing many projects, from the smallest that take a single day and just yourself to complete, to those that take a year and many people to complete. Project Management is like personal time management, but on a much larger scale. Depending on the complexity of the project, you may spend all of your time managing it instead of actually producing any work yourself.

Project management is a skill set most people don't naturally possess. It has to be learned through training and experience. It is much more than just learning how to use Microsoft Project and creating nice-looking PERT charts. It involves managing people and other resources, over time, to accomplish a specific goal. While you can buy books about project management, the best way to learn it is by taking formal classes or seminars on it. Once you have learned the basics, then it is usually trial by fire when you begin your first project. Hopefully, it will be a small project that will give you the experience you need before tackling large projects.

Leadership Skills

Leadership is a hard concept to define. Essentially, it is the ability to define an objective, to clearly communicate what the objective is, and why it is important to others, and then to get other people to help you reach that objective.

When many people think about leadership, they think about politicians or corporate CEOs. While they need to have good leadership skills, so does the Exceptional DBA. In many cases, the ability to be able to clearly define goals, communicate them to others, and then get others to work toward the common goal, is a valuable skill. Leadership can come into play in meetings, teams, or large projects. You don't have to be a manager to be a leader.

Most people don't consider themselves leadership material. However, in many cases they are doing themselves an injustice. Everyone has the ability to define goals, communicate them, and get other people to help attain them. Essentially, it is a matter of planning and execution, sprinkled with a lot of people skills. While you can take leadership classes, the best way to learn leadership skills is to take on the responsibilities of a leader, and get hands-on experience.

Writing Skills

As much as you might dislike writing, it is a very important skill to learn. Virtually every day, you will find yourself communicating with others in writing, whether it's via an e-mail, some documentation, or a formal report. Unfortunately, writing is a skill that is poorly taught by most schools, including universities. If you realize you don't have the skills to be a good writer (grammar, punctuation, style), then you need to take it upon yourself to learn these. This is not easy, especially if your previous schooling has been weak. Your best option is to take formal writing classes to master these skills. While you can read books and take short seminars on writing, it is hard to learn how to write well unless you get regular feedback.

Once you have learned writing basics, the next step is to develop your skill by practicing. The more you write, the better you will become. Many DBAs who want to become better writers get experience by writing articles for websites and magazines. As a beginner, you may not get paid much, or not at all. Nevertheless, and more importantly, you will get the experience and feedback that will help make you a better writer, a better communicator, and a better DBA.

Speaking Skills

We have all heard that public speaking is the most feared of all human activities. I am not sure that I fully agree with this statement, but public speaking does not come naturally to many people. Learning public speaking skills is important for the Exceptional DBA because you will find yourself doing it, whether you plan to or not. For example, you may have to present at a meeting, teach an in-house seminar, or even find yourself talking at a user's group meeting. What most people don't realize about speaking is that you have to plan it, you just can't wing it.

Like writing, I feel that the best way to learn public speaking is by taking formal training classes and/or seminars. You might also want to join a speaking club, such as Toastmasters International. Once you have the fundamentals down, then you need to practice and practice. Start practicing at work. Then practice at presenting at organizations you belong to, and so on. Start small and work yourself up to speaking to larger and larger groups, and from short sessions to longer sessions.

Knowledge of Legal Responsibilities

As DBAs, we often find ourselves involved in fulfilling legal responsibilities, such as maintaining data privacy, or archiving data for legally defined periods of time. In order to carry out the legal responsibilities of the job, you have to know what your responsibilities are. Simply claiming to be ignorant of the law won't work. In fact, it is possible to go to jail for failing to meet your legal obligations.

The difficulty is in finding out what those legal responsibilities are, as they vary from industry to industry, state to state, and country to country. Because you are not an attorney, and because your manager is not an attorney, it is important that you ask the upper management of your organization to specifically define what your legal responsibilities are.

Summary: Starting Honing Your Skills Today (and don't stop)

Becoming an Exceptional DBA involves more than just knowing a lot about SQL Server. It includes knowing about hardware, the operating system, best practices, leadership, time management, communication skills, and much more. This may seem like a lot of material to master. And it is. Nobody can be expected to master all of this in a short time period. Instead, it is accomplished over time.

If you find that you come up short in some of these critical knowledge areas, start today by picking out one or two of them and then work on them every day until you master them. Only through perseverance and hard work will you become an Exceptional DBA.

Being a DBA is not a static career. It changes all the time. While the soft skills you need may not change over time, your technical skills will have to be constantly refreshed as hardware, the operating system, and SQL Server evolves over time.

The Exceptional DBA is lifelong learner, and makes learning a regular part of his or her regular activities. Some DBAs make it a point to read books, magazines, or web-based content on a daily basis, while others prefer to attend formal training or conferences. It doesn't matter how you learn, as long as you don't stop.

CHAPTER 5: IS PROFESSIONAL CERTIFICATION NECESSARY?

Bring up the merits of professional certification with a group of DBAs, and you are guaranteed to start an argument. Some DBAs are proud of their certifications and maintain them assiduously, taking new exams as each new version of the software is released, and displaying all their certificates above their desk. Others are certified, but don't publicize the fact. Some DBAs get certified at the start of their career, but then don't bother renewing their certification when new products are released. And there are yet other DBAs who brag about the fact that they have never taken a certification exam, nor will they ever take one.

According to Microsoft, as of early 2008:

- 149,590 people have received the SQL Server 2000 MCDBA certification (to be phased out in early 2009)
- 24,939 people have received the MCTS: SQL Server 2005 certification
- 4,006 people have received the MCITP: Database Administrator certification;
- 1,596 people have received the MCITP: Database Developer certification
- 801 people have received the MCTS: Business Intelligence certification.

As you can see, while the SQL Server 2000 MCDBA certification was very popular, the newer SQL Server 2005 certifications have been much less so. While it is hard to know the reason for this, it might be an indication that certification is not as important to DBAs as it has been in the past.

When it really comes down to it, becoming certified in SQL Server does not make you an Exceptional DBA. In fact, many Exceptional DBAs have never taken a certification test. However, in my opinion, there are definite advantages to certification, depending on your situation. In this chapter, we will examine the different types of certification available, and some of the benefits of certification. We will finish the chapter by trying to answer that age-old question: "Should I get certified as a DBA?"

SQL Server Certification

Over the years, Microsoft has offered a wide range of different certifications for SQL Server. Certifications first became available with SQL Server 6.5, with separate tests for administration and development. SQL Server 7.0 followed the same format. When SQL Server 2000 was introduced, certification was changed to the MCDBA, which required 4 exams to achieve certification. With the introduction of SQL Server 2005, Microsoft introduced two different types of SQL Server certifications: the Microsoft Certified Technology Specialist (MCTS) and Microsoft Certified IT Professional (MCITP). For SQL Server 2008, Microsoft intends to continue offering the MCTS and MCITP certifications, with some minor changes to the MCTS certification, which I will discuss shortly.

For the latest certification news, check out Microsoft's learning portal at
http://www.microsoft.com/learning/default.mspx.

Microsoft Certified Technology Specialist

The Microsoft Certified Technology Specialist (MCTS) certification is designed to recognize an individual's skills in a specific Microsoft technology. Microsoft offers a wide variety of Technology Specialist certifications, including two that are of specific interest to DBAs of SQL Server 2005, and three that are of specific interest to DBAs of SQL Server 2008.

The SQL Server 2005 MCTS certification includes these two options:

- SQL Server 2005 Technology Specialist
- SQL Server 2005 Business Intelligence Technology Specialist

To receive the SQL Server 2005 Technology Specialist credential, you must pass the exam: *Microsoft SQL Server 2005 – Implementation and Maintenance* (70-431). This exam tests your knowledge of SQL Server 2005 tools usage, tool navigation, wizard use, Transact-SQL, code debugging, and troubleshooting. It is designed for all DBAs, and is the most basic of all the SQL Server 2005 tests available. It encompasses the foundation of knowledge that all SQL Server DBAs should possess.

To receive the SQL Server 2005 Business Intelligence Technology Specialist credential, you must pass the exam: *Microsoft SQL Server 2005 Business Intelligence—Implementation and Maintenance* (70-445). This exam tests your knowledge of SQL Server 2005 SSAS management, SSAS development, data mining, managing SSRS, report development, BI solutions development, and SSIS administration. It is designed for DBAs who specialize in SQL Server 2005 business intelligence, and encompasses the foundation of knowledge that all SQL Server Business Intelligence DBAs should possess.

The SQL Server 2008 MCTS certification includes these three options:

- SQL Server 2008 Implementation and Maintenance
- SQL Server 2008 Database Development
- SQL Server 2008 Business Intelligence Development and Maintenance

To receive the SQL Server 2008 Implementation and Maintenance Specialist credential, you must pass the exam 70-432, which covers the following topics: installing and configuring, maintaining SQL instances, managing security, managing a database, data management tasks, monitoring and troubleshooting, optimizing, and implementing high availability.

To receive the SQL Server 2008 Database Development credential, you must pass the exam 70-433, which covers Transact-SQL coding and development.

To receive the SQL Server 2008 Business Intelligence Development and Maintenance credential, you must pass the exam 70-448, which covers the following topics: configuring, deploying, maintaining and implementing SSIS, SSRS, and SSAS.

To receive any of the above certifications, only a single test is required. A side benefit of taking any of the above exams is that they get you one-step closer to receiving the Microsoft Certified IT Professional certification, as each of these exams counts towards this certification.

Microsoft Certified IT Professional

The Microsoft Certified IT Professional (MCITP) certification is Microsoft's premier certification. It encompasses multiple tests, each of which covers a specific subject matter area. Microsoft offers three different IT Professional certifications of interest to DBAs, for both SQL Server 2005 and SQL Server 2008:

- Database Administrator
- Database Developer
- Business Intelligence Developer

The MCITP certification includes multiple tests (different tests for SQL Server 2005 and 2008) and a covers a wider range of subject matter knowledge, so this certification is considered superior than the Technology Specialists certifications. While most DBAs will pick a single certification, some really motivated DBAs might want to get them all.

Note that the SQL Server 2008 tests names and numbers have not been designated at the time of this writing, but will be similar to the SQL Server 2005 tests.

Database Administrator IT Professional

As its name indicates, this certification is designed for DBA Administrators, and includes three required exams:

- Microsoft SQL Server 2005 – Implementation and Maintenance (70-431)
- Designing a Database Server Infrastructure by Using Microsoft SQL Server 2005 (70-444)
- Optimizing and Maintaining a Database Administration Solution by Using Microsoft SQL Server 2005 (70-444)

Database Developer IT Professional

This certification is designed for DBAs who focus on database development, and includes three required exams:

- Microsoft SQL Server 2005 – Implementation and Maintenance (70-431)
- Designing Database Solutions by Using Microsoft SQL Server 2005 (70-441)
- Designing and Optimizing Data Access by Using Microsoft SQL Server 2005 (70-442)

Business Intelligence Developer IT Professional

No surprises here. This certification is designed for DBAs who specialize in Business Intelligence, and includes two required exams:

- Microsoft SQL Server 2005 Business Intelligence – Implementation and Maintenance (70-445)
- Designing a Business Intelligence Infrastructure by Using Microsoft SQL Server 2005 (70-446)

Other Certifications of Interest to DBAs

In the previous chapter, we talked about how important it is for the DBA to be familiar with the hardware and operating system that SQL Server runs on. While you don't have to be certified in hardware or the operating system to be an Exceptional DBA, doing so can certainly help you to round out your knowledge. Below are some certifications that you might consider:

- **CompTIA A+**: Vendor-neutral certification on computer hardware. Recommended for all DBAs so they become familiar with hardware basics.
- **CompTIA Network+**: Vendor-neutral certification on networking. Recommended for all DBAs so they become familiar with networking concepts and troubleshooting.
- **CompTIA Security+**: Vendor-neutral certification on security. You might be interested in this certification if you are a DBA Administrator and have an interest in understanding all aspects of security.
- **Microsoft Technology Specialist – Windows Server 2003 Hosted Environments, Configuration, and Management**: This single exam certification is recommended for all DBAs so they become familiar with Windows Server.
- **Microsoft Technology Specialist—Windows Server 2008 Network Infrastructure Configuration**: If you are planning to move to Windows Server 2008, then you may want to consider this exam.
- **Microsoft Certified IT Professional: Server Administrator**: This three exam certification is recommended for all DBA Administrators as it helps provide a deep understanding of the Windows operating system. This is available for both Windows Server 2003 and 2008.
- **Microsoft Certified Professional Developer:** Microsoft offers a variety of certifications for developers. If you are a DBA Developer, attaining one or more of these certifications will help round out your knowledge of how applications interact with SQL Server.

Benefits of Certification

While becoming certified in various SQL Server specialties won't necessarily make you an Exceptional DBA, I believe it has some key benefits that can contribute to this goal.

Helps to Focus Your Training Efforts

In my opinion, the biggest benefit of becoming certified is that the process of passing exams helps you to focus your learning. In other words, I don't necessarily take exams because I want to have a particular certification; I do it because it forces me to study in a systematic way. Taking and passing exams can act as a motivator to get you to spend the time necessary to master your DBA specialty, and other technology areas important to the DBA.

Broadens your Knowledge

Most of the exams you will take for certification require you to learn a broad range of information and, in that sense, certification exams force you to study technology areas that you might otherwise ignore. For example, let's say that you are a DBA Administrator and focus your learning on administrative tasks. This is great, but if you neglect to learn about how application development affects SQL Server's performance, you are missing out on a lot of useful knowledge.

Distinguishes You from Other DBAs

When it comes time for an internal promotion, or when you are competing for a new job, being certified will help to distinguish you from other candidates. It demonstrates that you keep up with new technology and have mastered the basic skills needed to be a successful DBA.

However, while certification can distinguish you from others, it is not a substitute for experience. In many cases, the more experienced DBA (even without certification) will get the promotion or job over a less experienced DBA with certification.

Some Companies Require Certification

While most companies don't require their DBA to be certified, some do. So, if you are interested in working for a company that only hires certified DBAs, then you have no choice but to become certified.

Company Recognition and Rewards

Some companies treat certified employees differently than non-certified employees. For example, certified employees may be given more responsibility, have better chances of promotion, and may even be paid bonuses based on the certifications they receive.

Peer Recognition

While many DBAs may not care about this, your effort to become certified often brings peer recognition and respect.

Can become a Microsoft Certified Trainer

If you interested in the career opportunities available to a Microsoft Certified Trainer (MCT), you must first get certified in your specialty area. Generally, you will need to get your MCITP before you pursue your MCT credentials.

Potential College Credit

Some colleges and universities will award college credit for taking certification classes and passing certification tests. This can be beneficial if you are finishing your schooling, or are going back to school for additional training, or a new degree.

Microsoft Specific Benefits

Once you pass any Microsoft certification exam, you become a Microsoft Certified Professional (MCP), and Microsoft will offer you some benefits as a reward. Some of these specific benefits include, but are not limited to:

- A listing in the MCP Directory
- Access to a private Microsoft Certification web site, which includes a lot of free information
- Access to the Microsoft Product Support Knowledge Base, which is not available to the public
- Invitations to conferences, training, and special events
- Monthly newsletter subscription
- A transcript that can be printed
- A printed certificate you can display
- Use of the Microsoft certification logo

Should I Get Certified as a DBA?

As I said earlier, becoming a certified DBA will not make you an Exceptional DBA, and nor does being an Exceptional DBA require that you become a certified DBA. With this in mind, I want to offer the following advice about becoming certified. I offer it with the proviso that everyone is different, so the advice offered here may or may not apply to you. Read my recommendations, and take away from them the advice that best applies to you.

Who Should Seriously Consider Becoming a Certified DBA?

I highly recommend you get certified as a DBA if you fall into any of the following categories:

- You are currently not a DBA, but want to become a DBA.
- You are a DBA by training or accident, but have little or no practical experience.
- You are a DBA, with or without experience, and you want to work for a company that requires that their DBAs be certified.
- You are a DBA working for a consulting company, and getting certified helps to distinguish yourself and your company from other consulting companies.
- You want to become a Microsoft Certified Trainer and teach SQL Server classes.

Who Should Consider Becoming a Certified DBA?

If you fall into one of the following categories, then I suggest you check out DBA certification, as it may be beneficial to you, although not required.

- You are a DBA and have experience, but your body of knowledge is narrow and you want to broaden that knowledge base.
- For whatever reason, you have not kept up with the latest versions of SQL Server and you want to force yourself to catch up.
- You work in a competitive company and are seeking to become promoted.
- You work in a competitive job market, and you are applying for a new job and you want to distinguish yourself from other job applicants.

Who Might Not Want to Consider Certification?

There are some DBAs who may not be interested in certification, or they may not benefit from being certified.

- You have five or more years of solid DBA experience, and you have no trouble keeping up with the latest in SQL Server technology on your own.
- You are a DBA who was certified in an earlier version of SQL Server, have lots of experience as a DBA, and you have no trouble keeping up with the latest in SQL Server technology, so you don't want to bother being re-certified each time a new version of SQL Server is released.
- You are one of those rare DBAs who don't need any motivation to learn and can do it on your own, and you are so confident in your skills that you don't need to show them off to anyone by becoming certified.

In my experience, DBAs who fall into the latter category tend to be a little arrogant, which is not a good trait for an Exceptional DBA. Having faith in your own ability is fine, but don't let this slip into arrogance or complacency, or you may find it a little harder to find or keep a job as a DBA.

Are There Any Downsides to Certification?

The answer to this depends on what you consider a downside. For example, people might consider the following as downsides to certification, but others will not.

- **Taking certification exams costs money**.
  Many companies will pay for certification tests for their employees, and if this is the case for you, then this downside is null and void.
- **Preparing for certification exams costs money**.
  If you take a formal class, attend seminars, or even buy books, it will cost you money out of pocket. In fact, if you take formal classes for certification, you can end up spending many thousands of dollars, depending on where you get your training. Again, many companies will pay for certification training as well as for taking the exams. In addition, some U.S. government agencies offer training reimbursement, or you can take advantage of the U.S. federal tax credit for learning, to help offset part of the cost.
- **Preparing for certification exams takes time**.
  Many people spend hours of their own time preparing to take certification exams. In other cases, you may work for a company that allows you time off for training, although you will still need to spend some of your personal time on studying. However, even if you don't want to become certified, you will still be spending a lot of your own time studying, in order to keep up with the technology. If you look at it this way, then spending time studying is just part of being a DBA, and is not a downside, unless you don't like to study. And if you don't like to study, then you don't want to become a DBA.

How to Get Your Employer to Help Pay for Your Certification

If you decide you want to go the certification route, and you don't have the financial resources to pay for it yourself, try to enlist the help of your employer. Many employers realize the importance of on-going education and certification ,and provide a training budget for their employees. If your company offers such a program, then don't waste this opportunity.

If your employee doesn't have a formal training program, then write up a proposal to your manager, explaining the benefits of you getting trained and certified, along with the associated costs, so the manager knows exactly what is involved. If you write up a thoughtful proposal, demonstrating the benefits for the organization's investment, then you will be on the right

track for getting that approval. If your organization isn't interested in helping you out, then you might want to consider finding one that will.

Summary: There is little Downside to Certification

While you can be an Exceptional DBA without becoming certified, I think that, for most people, there is little to no downside to becoming a certified DBA. Because of this, I generally recommend certification to those people who ask me about it.

If you are new to SQL Server certification, I suggest you start with the MCTS certification that best matches your SQL Server interests. For example, if you are interested in SQL Server 2008 DBA administration, get the SQL Server 2008 Implementation and Maintenance certification. If you are interested in SQL Server 2008 DBA development, get the SQL Server 2008 Database Development certification, and if you are interested in SQL Server 2008 BI, then get the SQL Server 2008 Business Intelligence Development and Maintenance certification. Note that the 2008 exams won't be available until late 2008. If you are impatient, you can take the 2005 exams now.

Once you have taken one or more of these tests, and you feel ambitious, consider getting the MCITP in your area of specialization. Training and certification is an on-going process, but it can be rewarding if you want to make the most of your career as a DBA.

CHAPTER 6: PARTICIPATE IN THE SQL SERVER COMMUNITY

One key trait of the Exceptional DBA is a willingness to share knowledge. This chapter starts by discussing the considerable benefits of sharing your knowledge with the SQL Server community, and then looks in detail at some of the ways in which you can participate.

Benefits of Sharing Your SQL Server Knowledge

Many DBAs regard their job simply as a way to make money. In other words, they use their profession to benefit themselves without any thought to how they could benefit others. I guess there is nothing inherently wrong with this philosophy, but I have discovered that Exceptional DBAs tend to think a little differently. Instead of just focusing on what their profession can bring to them, they also consider what they can bring to their profession. While at first this might seem contradictory (how can giving of your time help you?), there are many benefits to be gained from sharing your knowledge with the SQL Server community.

Increase Your Depth of Knowledge

Without a doubt, the most common feedback I hear from DBAs who spend a lot of time in SQL Server forums, answering questions, is this: "I have learned more from answering questions than I could learn from any other source." In other words, by giving up some of their own time to help others, they have ended up benefiting enormously from the experience.

How is this possible? Exceptional DBAs use the questions posed in forums as a way to learn more about the behavior of SQL Server. For example, a question posted in a SQL Server forum asks the best way to optimize a particular query. The question includes information on the current table schema, indexes, the data, and the query that is running slowly. An Exceptional DBA will regard such a question as an opportunity to improve their skills. They will consider the question carefully, even doing additional research and testing if necessary, before providing a detailed and thoughtful answer. By repeating the process of reading, analyzing, and answering questions, over and over, the Exceptional DBA will significantly increase the depth of their SQL Server knowledge.

In other cases, Exceptional DBAs will encounter questions that touch areas or behavior that they have never seen before, and that they have no idea how to answer. Again, such questions will be taken as a challenge, and they will research until an answer is found, learning something new about SQL Server in the process. This experience broadens their knowledge base.

While I have used forums as an example of how contributing to the SQL Server community is valuable, this benefit is not limited to forums. For example, every time a DBA writes a blog entry, an article, or even a book, or makes a presentation to other DBAs, they have an opportunity to learn more about SQL Server than they did before.

Virtually every time you participate in the SQL Server community, you will be rewarded with new learning experiences.

Make New Contacts

However you share your knowledge and experience with the SQL Server community, you will be meeting new people. If you participate in forums, you will meet DBAs from all over the world. If you write blog entries, you get to exchange ideas with other DBAs. If you write articles or books, you will attract an audience who enjoys your work, and who often encourage you to write even more.

If you make presentations to local user groups, or national conferences, you get the opportunity not only to meet other DBAs, but also industry leaders and Microsoft SQL

Server team members. These people can provide insight into the industry that you can't get anywhere else. Making new contacts is useful for making new friends, finding new jobs, and learning information to which most people don't have access.

Increase Your Experience and Further Develop Exceptional DBA Traits

Sharing your SQL Server knowledge, and making new friends and contacts, will also help you to develop other essential traits of the Exceptional DBA. For example:

- Writing forum posts, blog entries, articles, and books will help you to develop your written communications skills.
- Making new contacts helps develop your people skills.
- Speaking before groups gives you more experience as an oral communicator.
- Volunteering for local or national user groups helps develop leadership, teamworking, and project management skills.
- Developing your own website helps to develop your writing and coding skills.
- Writing and sharing Transact-SQL scripts helps to develop your Transact-SQL skills.

The examples could go on and on. Almost anything you do to help the SQL Server comm.-unity will also help to boost your skill set and experience.

It's Fun to Help Others

Another comment I often hear from DBAs who contribute to the SQL Server community is that it is just plain fun to do so. In other words, helping others is fun and makes being a DBA a more enjoyable profession. Whenever you answer a forum question, it's great when the person who asked the question thanks you for your time and effort. When you run a website or write a book, it's a great feeling to receive "fan" mail from people who read and benefitted from what you wrote. Making it into the "top 10 posters" list on a forum, for the month or year, can give you a great sense of achievement.

Along with having fun, helping others can help you gain more self-confidence, which is another important trait of the Exceptional DBA.

Become a SQL Server MVP

Microsoft recognizes that DBAs who help other DBAs provide a great benefit to the SQL Server community, besides helping to spread the word about their tools and technology. To help promote and reward community involvement, Microsoft has developed its very successful Most Valuable Professional (MVP) Award program.

Essentially, the MVP Award program recognizes people who are technical and community leaders in their sphere of Microsoft technology (this covers any Microsoft software, not just SQL Server). These are people who are not only subject matter experts, but who also share their technical knowledge with their respective communities. A typical MVP may:

- Contribute heavily to technical forums and newsgroups
- Write blogs, articles, and even books
- Speak at user groups or conferences
- Run community websites
- Beta test Microsoft software and provide feedback

When Microsoft recognizes a person as an MVP, they are recognizing the person's contributions to the community. Along with intangible benefits, such industry recognition, receipt of this award comes with many direct privileges and benefits, including:

- Access to a private MVP web site and news groups
- Access to private software betas

- The ability to contact Microsoft Product Managers and developers with specific questions
- Special training and conferences
- The ability to offer specific feedback on SQL Server

How do you become a SQL Server MVP? It comes down to how much you contribute to the SQL Server community. Microsoft employees, and current MVPs, regularly monitor who is contributing to the SQL Server community, and make MVP nominations based on these contributions. Periodically, teams within Microsoft review the nominations and make the selections. The MVP Award is made for a single year. To maintain the status of MVP, the MVP must continue to contribute to the community on a regular basis.

How Can I Contribute to the SQL Server Community?

Hopefully, by this stage, you are convinced of the many benefits of sharing your skills and knowledge with the rest of the SQL Server community. In this section, we'll look in more detail at each of the many different ways you can participate and contribute to the community. While not all of them may appeal to you, I am sure you will find one or more opportunities to help. These opportunities are not listed in any particular order. Just pick the ones that find the most appealing.

Participate in Forums and News Groups

Participation in SQL Server forums (web-based) and news groups (NNTP-based) are the most common ways for a DBA to contribute to community. From here in, I will refer to both as forums, to reduce confusion. Answering (and asking) questions on these forums will provide many opportunities to learn from other DBAs.

There are many different SQL Server forums, each with their own personality. Some forums aren't very busy, while others are visited by thousands of people each day. Some forums are very business-like, while others are more relaxed. Some are well-moderated and encourage courtesy and respect at all times, while others are littered with flame wars. Most forums welcome newcomers, but a few (usually those dominated by a small "clique" of contributors), are not so welcoming. Some forums focus on specialty areas within SQL Server, while others are more general in their content.

I suggest you look around, find forum you like, and that suits your personality, and make it your home. By "home", I mean make the forum a place you visit regularly, both asking and answering questions. Personally, I feel it is better to have a home forum where you participate regularly, than to participate in many different forums. The more you participate in any given forum, the more you become known and the better the rapport you will develop with other members of the forum community.

If you actively participate in a forum, you may eventually be asked to become a forum moderator. Or, if you want, you can volunteer to be a moderator. The duties of a forum moderator varies from forum to forum, but it generally involves taking a lead in answering questions, ensuring posts are categorized correctly, settling community disputes, and helping to keep spam out of the forum. However, the most important aspect of becoming a forum moderator is that you have been recognized as an outstanding contributor of the forum. Below are listed some of the most popular SQL Server forums:

Microsoft Public SQL Server Newsgroups

http://www.microsoft.com/technet/community/newsgroups/server/sql.mspx

Microsoft MSDN Public SQL Server Forums

http://forums.microsoft.com/msdn/default.aspx?siteid=1&ForumGroupID=19

SQLServerCentral SQL Server Forums

http://www.sqlservercentral.com/

SQL-Server-Performance.Com SQL Server Forums

http://sql-server-performance.com/community/forums/Default.aspx

SQLTeam SQL Server Forums

http://www.sqlteam.com/forums/

Write and Share Scripts

One of the most valuable, but unsung, contributions you can make to the SQL Server community is to write and share useful Transact-SQL scripts. For example, if you have a clever script to kill all SPIDS, or a script to making backups easier, it's probable that other DBAs would like to see and use them. Many DBAs write their own scripts to make administrative tasks easier, and sharing them with the SQL Server community is a great contribution.

If you have scripts, how do you share them? There are many options. You can post them:

- In Transact-SQL script libraries available on some websites
- In forums
- On your own blogs, or other's blogs, or on your own website

However you share you scripts, they will be greatly appreciated by the SQL Server community.

SQLServerCentral.Com Script Archive

http://www.sqlservercentral.com/Contributions/Home

SQL-Server-Performance.Com SQL Server Forums

http://sql-server-performance.com/community/forums/Default.aspx

Join and Participate in a Local User's Group

Many cities have a local SQL Server user's group and/or a .NET user's group that you can join. User groups are a place where database and development professionals can get together and share their experiences, make new contacts, find out about new job opportunities, learn from presentations, socialize, and more.

Most, but not all, SQL Server user's groups are associated with SQLPass, an international organization for SQL Server professionals. Most local user's group members are either part-time or full-time DBAs, or SQL Server developers.

Some DBAs, especially DBA developers, choose to join a .NET users group. In fact, there are many more .NET user's groups than there are SQL Server user's groups. Most local .NET

user's groups are associated with INETA, an international organization that focuses on .NET development.

There are many different ways in which you can participate with your local user's group. Some people attend for the learning and networking, and don't participate much beyond that. Others get more fully involved and help with leadership, marketing of the organization, managing the group's website, speaking at meetings, and even putting together day-long training events, such as SQLCamps or CodeCamps. User groups are a great way to improve your people, speaking, project management, and leadership skills.

If you don't live in a city with a SQL Server or .NET user's group, consider starting your own. If you do decide to go this route, it's worth approaching either SQLPASS or INETA to have them help you start the group.

List of SQLPass.org Local User Groups

https://www.sqlpass.org/Pages/Chapters.aspx

List of INETA .NET User Groups

http://www.ineta.org/DesktopDefault.aspx?tabindex=1&tabid=20

Join and Participate in SQLPass or INETA at the National Level

Besides getting involved in a local user's group, you can join and participate in SQLPass or INETA at the national level. Each year, both groups offer national conferences, in addition to smaller, one-day events. As with joining a local user's group, you can participate as a member, you can offer your services as a volunteer to help out at one of the national events, or you can volunteer to make a presentation at an event.

Some DBAs like to participate at both the local and national levels, while others prefer to participate in one or the other. If there is no local user's group you can attend, and you don't want to start up your own, then you may want to consider joining a national organization.

SQLPass.org SQL Server Users Group

https://www.sqlpass.org

INETA.org .NET Users Group

http://www.ineta.org

Speak at SQL Server Community Events

For the DBA who wants to speak and share his or her knowledge, there many of opportunities for you. For example, most user's groups meet monthly, and as part of the meeting there will generally be a technical presentation. Given that there are hundreds of user's groups, and most meet monthly, there are thousands of opportunities to speak. Besides user's group meeting, there are user's groups sponsored events, such as SQLCamps and CodeCamps, PASS-sponsored events, INETA-sponsored events, and many industry conferences, all of which need speakers.

If you've little experience of public speaking then my advice is to start out small, and volunteer to speak at a local user's group meeting. This is a great way to get experience and establish yourself as a speaker. From there, you can move on to larger regional and national events and conferences.

Bear in mind that most conferences have a restricted time period, often called a "call for speakers", during which interested parties can send in speaking proposals/abstracts for consideration. If you want to speak at these conferences, you will have to send in your proposals/abstracts using a specified format (which you can usually find at the conference's

website), and during the specified timeframe. Some conferences pay a speaker a stipend and/or traveling costs, while others don't pay anything or cover any expenses (except, perhaps, free entrance to the conference).

Also bear in mind that the more popular the conference, the more competition there will be for speaking slots. Don't be discouraged if you don't get to speak at events such as Tech Ed or PASS the first time of asking. To help maximize your chances of being selected as a speaker to a national conference, first get some local speaking experience, select topics that are unique, and submit ideas across a range of different topics.

Speaking is a great way to not only participate in the SQL Server community and is possibly the most effective way to establish a national reputation in your area of expertise.

SQLPass Community Summit

https://www.sqlpass.org

SQL Server Magazine Connections

http://www.devconnections.com/shows/sql/default.asp?s=59

SQLTeach Conference

http://www.sqlteach.com

Write a Blog

Writing your own blog is a quick and easy way to begin sharing your knowledge with the SQL Server community. At little or no cost, and minimal setup, you can start blogging almost immediately. Blogs are a great way to share information, with their main strength and benefit being that they are highly interactive. Most blogs allow authenticated readers to comment on any blog entry, encouraging an often-lively two-way conversation between you and readers.

Some bloggers start up their own blog website using a domain name they select. If you want to really customize your blog and "make it your own", this may be a good option for you. The downside is that you have to market your blog so others find out about it.

Another option is be blog at an established SQL Server-related blogging website. Most SQL Server community sites offer their members free blogs. While you may not be able to customize the blog as you could with a blog you run yourself, it makes marketing it much easier, as you have a ready-made audience from the site where your blog is hosted.

Most DBAs who blog write about what they know best, namely SQL Server. They may write about new things they have learned, tricks of the trade, industry news, or their opinions on how a particular feature of SQL Server works. Blog entries can be short or long, technical or witty. Virtually any topic can be covered, using whatever writing style you prefer.

While blogs are a good way to contribute to the SQL Server community, a successful blog requires that you regularly contribute new and fresh content. If you only write a post once a month to announce that you are speaking at some event, then you are providing no real value to the community, your blog will be visited rarely, and the conversation with your readers will die, which defeats the whole purpose of the blog.

So, if you decide to create your own blog, you must make a commitment to blog regularly – at least once a week. If you can't make that commitment, then consider some other way that works better for you, such as writing articles, where you can write and submit them at your leisure.

SQLServerCentral.Com Blogs

http://blogs.sqlservercentral.com

Blogger.Com Free Blog Hosting

http://www.blogger.com

WordPress.Com Free Blog Hosting

http://wordpress.com

LiveJournal.Com Free Blog Hosting

http://www.livejournal.com

Write Articles

Writing articles on how to get the best out of SQL Server is a great way to share your knowledge with the SQL Server community. Unlike blogs, you generally don't have to commit to writing an article once a week, giving you the opportunity to write when you have the time. Many novice writers start by contributing articles to smaller community websites, where the quality of the writing is not as critical, and where you seldom, if ever, get paid for your efforts. However, the main reason you are writing should be because you want to share your knowledge and to gain writing experience, not to make money.

If you are a good writer, then you can begin writing for larger websites, or even magazines, which pay for the articles you write. Pay for most articles tends to be in the $25.00 to $300.00 range, depending on the size and success of the website/publication, the length of the article, the originality of the article, and the writing quality of the article.

If you are interested in article writing, you should first check out the writer's guidelines of your chosen website or magazine. The guidelines will tell you what kind of articles they are looking for, along with how much they pay, if anything. Generally speaking, it is better to contact a website/publication with your article idea, to see if they are interested, rather than sending in articles on speculation.

If you don't have much writing experience, you may find that writing your first couple of articles is hard. However, the more you write, the easier it gets. In addition, many of the better quality websites and magazines will edit your work, sometimes sending the article back to you for a rewrite. Don't let this discourage you. Instead, use it as feedback you can use to improve your writing skills. If you need some writing tips, do an Internet search on "how to write articles" for lots of help.

SQLServerCentral.Com Writer's Guidelines

http://www.sqlservercentral.com/About/WriteForUs

Simple-Talk.Com Writer's Guidelines

http://www.simple-talk.com/become-an-author.aspx

SQL-Server-Performance.Com Writer's Guidelines

http://www.sql-server-performance.com/about/contribute.aspx

SQLTeam.Com Writer's Guidelines

http://www.sqlteam.com/writeforus.aspx

Write or Co-Write a Book

Writing a book is a huge undertaking. Back in the days of SQL Server 7.0 (or even 2000) it was not uncommon to see single-author books covering every aspect of SQL Server. The considerable expansion of the platform with SQL Server 2005, coupled with the relatively short shelf life of most SQL Server books (due to new software versions), means that most publishers now find a team of writers that can write the book as quickly as possible. Each author contributes chapters in their particular area of expertise.

This is good news for you, especially if you are not an established book writer, as this provides you with a greater opportunity to get involved in book writing. First, however, you need to become an expert in your chosen SQL Server specialty and, ideally, to have established yourself a good writer. One of the best ways to do this is to get some published articles under your belt. With this combination of writing skills and technical knowledge, you can approach a book publisher and let them know of your strengths, and that you would like to participate in an upcoming book project.

Another way to get your foot in the book publishing door is to get to know existing SQL Server book authors, and ask them for help. Some of them may be currently working on a book project and know of co-writing opportunities that are available.

If you are really ambitious, and confident in your writing and technical skills, you can write a book proposal and send it to publishers for their review. You can propose to write the entire book (assuming you can do it quickly), or propose to write part of it, and even suggest people you know that might be good candidates as co-writers for the book.

Virtually all book publishers have writer's guidelines available. Before you contact any publisher, it is a good idea to read those guidelines so that you understand what the publishers are looking for. Each publisher is different and has different needs and interests, and you don't want to waste your time, and their time, on sending book proposals that don't interest them.

Microsoft Press Author's Guidelines

http://www.microsoft.com/learning/books/author/default.mspx

Wrox Press Author's Guidelines

http://www.wrox.com/WileyCDA/Section/id-105073.html

O'Reilly Publishing Author's Guidelines

http://www.oreilly.com/oreilly/author/intro.csp

Start a Website

Of all the different ways you can participate and share with the SQL Server community, starting a SQL Server-related community website is one of the most rewarding, but also the most time-consuming. In fact, if you do it well, you may end up spending all your time devoted to managing and maintaining the website, which is pretty much what happened to me with the SQL-Server-Performance.com site.

If you do an Internet search for SQL Server websites, you will find dozens of them. However, if you take a close look at them, you will notice that most have little content and aren't current. This is because lots of people dream of starting their own website, but once they do and discover how much work it is, they stop, and the website dies.

If you want to start your own SQL Server website, I have the following suggestions:

- Focus the website on a specific SQL Server-related topic that is not already covered by another website.
- Design the website so that it is easy for the SQL Server community to participate and contribute content.
- Learn everything you can about starting, managing, and marketing your website. There is plenty of helpful advice on the Internet.
- Ensure that you have 10+ hours a week you can devote to the website, week after week, month after month, year after year.
- Start small and don't invest a lot of money in the website until you know that you have an audience for your content, and the commitment to make the site work.
- Focus your energies on adding original content on a regular basis, rather than perfecting the design, look-and-feel, etc.

Mentor a Novice DBA

One of the best ways to develop your own knowledge, while helping others, is to mentor new and upcoming DBAs. These may be people at the organization where you are working, or it might even include DBAs you meet from your local user's group, or even a DBA on the other side of the world that you know through a SQL Server forum.

Mentoring need not take a lot of your time, but it will involve meetings, phone calls, and e-mails where you share information and offer career advice. There are many novice DBAs, and many of them would be delighted if you could help them out.

Summary: Participate in the SQL Server Community Today

Throughout this chapter, we have discussed the many different ways in which you can share your knowledge and contribute to the SQL Server community. In addition, we have seen the many benefits that come from doing so. If you are not already sharing your knowledge, start today. To get started, find a SQL Server forum you like and begin participating. Later, when you have time, find other ways to contribute. You will find that the time you spend helping others is time well spent. Ask any Exceptional DBA, they will tell you the same thing.

CHAPTER 7: MANAGE YOUR CAREER, DON'T LET IT MANAGE YOU

It has been my experience that many people tend to "fall into" their career, instead of making a conscious decision as to what their career should be. I know that this is what happened to me. I went to university to get a degree in journalism, but ended up with two degrees, one in Economics and another in Business Administration. When I began looking for a job, after graduating, the first job I was offered was selling computers in a retail store. Twenty-seven years later, my career is that of a Database Administrator. When I started university, or even after graduating, I had no idea where my career was going, or where it would end up.

I got to where I wanted to be in the end but, on reflection, I would have saved a lot of time, and a lot of money, if I had actively *planned* my career, even just a little bit. Sure, there is no way to anticipate every little twist and turn that the future will bring, but I think a little forethought and planning can help smooth out the inevitable bumps that all people face on their career path.

In this chapter, I am going to talk about how important it is to consciously manage your career, rather than let your career just happen to you. This is especially important if you want to be an Exceptional DBA. Maybe by following some of these tips, your career will be a little smoother sailing than mine.

Define a Career Path

The career of DBA offers many options. Instead of just coasting along, without giving much thought to what you want to make of your career, you need to become proactive and choose a long-term career path that meets your wants and needs.

The key to defining your career path is to be proactive. Decide what is important to you, and choose jobs that meet your needs. One way to be proactive is to ask yourself the following questions. Keep in mind that there is no right or wrong answer to any of these questions. Your answers will depend on your priorities and interests. However, by answering these questions honestly, you should have greater clarity on how you want to pursue your career as a DBA.

Do you want to be a Competent or an Exceptional DBA?

While the focus of this book is on how to become an Exceptional DBA, I understand that not everyone wants to make the required effort to become an Exceptional DBA. Many DBAs will be content on just being competent. There is nothing wrong with this, assuming it is a conscious choice. My challenge to you is to decide whether or not you want to be an Exceptional DBA, and then plan your career accordingly. In other words, make a conscious decision to be a competent or Exceptional DBA. Should you decide that you want to be an Exceptional DBA, I further challenge you to take immediate steps to start designing that career.

What DBA specialty do you want to focus on?

Have you picked a specialty to master? If you have picked a specialty, are you happy with it? Do you want to change it? You might try one specialty, and then decide it is not right for you. That's OK. The key is to be aware of your options, and find the specialty where you feel most comfortable.

Do you want to travel, or stay put?

Some DBA jobs require no travel, others a little travel, and others a lot of travel. Have you thought about how much travel you want to do? Your answer to this question can significantly influence which jobs you apply for and eventually accept. While many DBAs are family-oriented and like to stay home, there are other DBAs who jump at any chance to travel.

What size of a company do you want to work for?

Companies of all sizes need DBAs, although you will find the most opportunities at larger organizations. Do you have a preference as to the size of the company you work for? Do you prefer the easy-going attitude of many small organizations, or do you like the competitiveness and opportunities of large organizations?

What kind of organization do you want to work for?

Do you want to work in a non-profit organization, an Internet startup, or an established multi-national organization? Different organizations have different working environments. Have you given any thought as to the industry you want work in? Would you be happier working for a government agency, an agricultural company, or a high-tech organization? I have talked to many DBAs working for government agencies who love their jobs because they like the stability of government work. If job stability is important to you, then a government job may be a better choice than an Internet startup.

What level of (seniority) do you want to attain?

In larger organizations, there may be many opportunities to advance. You might even have an opportunity to become a manager and lead a DBA team. Do you prefer to work for others and stay "hands on," or do you crave the challenge of managing others?

Where do you want to work?

DBA jobs are located virtually everywhere, from small towns to large cities, from the inner city to the suburbs, and everywhere in between. Do you have a preference on where you want to spend your career? Do you want to work where you have access to the beach, the forests, or the mountains? Do you prefer hot or cold weather? Do you want to live close to family members, or do you want to escape them?

How much do you want to be paid?

You may think that you have little control over how much you are paid. It's true that you don't have full control, but you have more control than you think. There are many factors that determine how much you are paid. For example, the Exceptional DBA will earn more than the average DBA. Working in a large company or in a large city is usually rewarded with more pay. Likewise, a job that involves regular travel will often attract a higher salary. The SQL Server specialty you choose may also affect your earning power. Keep in mind that if salary is of great concern to you, then you will want to make choices that contribute to achieving this goal. Currently, DBAs who specialize in Business Intelligence can write their own ticket in many cases.

When do you want to retire?

Some people want to retire early, while others don't want to ever retire. Each person is different and views retirement differently. The DBA job you take can significantly affect when you might be able to retire. For example, an organization's pay scale, benefits package, and the cost of living in the area where you live all affect when you can retire. So if early retirement is an important thing for you, then plan a career path that will help you attain it.

Do you want to be your own boss?

Many DBAs prefer to work for themselves as independent consultants because they like being in complete control of their career. Other DBAs prefer the security that working for a company brings. One option is no better than the other; they are just different. Decide what's most important to you, and then pursue the necessary steps to get there. One thing I have noticed when talking to many DBAs who have been consultants is that it is a career choice that can really wear on you. In other words, consultants have a higher than average burnout rate. Many consultants decide that it is not worth the trouble and return to being employees.

Do you have ambitions to become a SQL Server industry expert?

Many DBAs, even Exceptional DBAs, are content to limit their career, and the recognition they receive for it, to their place of work. Conversely, other DBAs like to see their career expand beyond their day-to-day work, using much of their free time to write, speak, or even do part-time consulting. Each option is very viable for DBAs.

Create a Plan and Set Goals

I recommend that you define what your long-term career plans are, and put them down on paper. Once you have decided where your career is going to take you, your next step is to set specific goals that define how you are going to get there.

Goals are specific actions that you will take in order to achieve your desired career path. When you define goals, keep the following criteria in mind.

Goals should be Short-Term

You can't predict the future, so it is best if you can keep goals short-term (a year or less). The shorter the time period you need to accomplish your goals, the lower the possibility of unexpected surprises getting in the way of you achieving them. For example, if you establish a goal that will take five years to accomplish, the odds of something happening within that five years to prevent you from attaining it are very high. By keeping goals short, they are more easily attainable. It is much better for your self-confidence to attain many short-term goals than it is to have fewer, longer-term goals that you may or may not reach.

Goals should be Specific

The more specific a goal is, the easier it is to attain. For example, a goal of "learning how to use Profiler to identify and troubleshoot SQL Server performance problems" is easier to attain than the goal of "learning how to use Profiler". If your goals are well-defined, and unambiguous, they will be more readily achievable.

Goals should be Realistic and Attainable

Any goal you set must be achievable within your given specification and time frame. For example, if you set yourself the goal of "learning how to use Profiler to identify and troubleshoot SQL Server performance problems" to a single weekend, then the odds of you meeting that goal are marginal. On the other hand, if you allow four weekends to accomplish this goal, then it is much more attainable.

Goals can be Small or Large

Just because a goal is realistic and attainable, it doesn't mean that it has to be small. If your goal is to change jobs within the next year, then this is a large goal, but one that can be achieved with the necessary planning and work.

Examples of Goals

To help you better understand what goals are, here are some examples of goals that are short-term, specific, realistic, and attainable:

- You want to learn how to master the Database Engine Tuning Advisor to tune indexes in the next 30 days.
- You want to improve your writing skills by writing a 2,000-word article on "SQL Server Backup and Restore Best Practices" to be published on a website within 90 days.
- You want to improve your speaking skills by making a presentation at the local user's group meeting next October.
- You want to update your SQL Server skills by attending a 1-week seminar next August on "How to Upgrade to SQL Server 2008."

Establish New Goals on a Yearly Basis

If you have a long-term career plan, then you need to break that plan down into a set of shorter-term goals, each goal forming an attainable milestone on your career path. An effective strategy is to establish a set of specific career goals on a yearly basis. By breaking down long-term plans into easily definable and attainable goals, attaining your overall career plan won't seem so difficult.

Take Action to Attain Your Goals

Many of us set goals, whether they are formal, written goals, as I have just described, or informal, unwritten goals, such as to read a certain book, to hike a trail, or to lose weight. As most of you know from personal experience, it is easy to let goals slip. Maybe you just don't have time, something else came up, you just don't feel like it right now, or you just plain forgot.

At the risk of stating the obvious, it's clear that if you want to manage your career, and not let your career manage you, then it's not enough just to create goals. You must also *act* on them. Goals don't fulfill themselves. It is only through your efforts that they will be realized. While I don't have any miraculous tips on how to accomplish your goals, here are a few that you might find useful:

- **Write each goal down on paper** (or at least in a word processing document). As part of this exercise, include any resources that you will need to accomplish the goal, the time schedule you want to achieve it in, and a description of why you want to accomplish the goal. The more thought you put into each goal, the more real it will become to you.
- **Post a list of your goals** somewhere close to you, so that you can see them every day.
- **Schedule your goals** as part of your appointment book. Don't just use Outlooks Calendar to schedule your regular job tasks, use it to schedule in time to accomplish your goals.
- **Enlist the help of others** to remind you about your goals, and to help you achieve them.
- **Use Web resources**. A simple Internet search on the key phrase "goal setting" will teach you a lot about how to set and attain goals.
- **As you complete a goal, check it off**, and then give yourself a little reward for accomplishing it, such as going out to eat, or seeing a movie.

- **Be patient**. Some goals take more work than others to attain. If you don't meet a goal, don't beat yourself up about it. Use it as a learning experience to do better at attaining the goal the next time you try.

Revaluate Goals and Long-Term Career Plans as Needed

A little earlier, I advised that you establish your goals on a yearly basis. Not only does this help you break long-term aims down into a set of short, attainable goals, it also helps you plan for change.

As time passes, your long-term career plans may change. This is normal, and expected. For example, you may get married, divorced, have a child, become ill, win a lottery, or experience one of many other things that can change your life for the better or worse.

Because your needs and wants change over time, your career plans may also change. In order to maintain control of your career, it is important that you periodically review your needs and wants, and alter your long-term career plans accordingly. This in effect will also affect your shorter-term goals, which may also need to change.

Essentially, you need to accept the fact that things will change. You must be aware of this, and make changes to your long-term career plans as appropriate.

Summary: It Takes a Conscious Decision on Your Part

You need to look out for your career, because nobody else is going to do it for you. If you want to be an Exceptional DBA, then you have to make a conscious decision to do that, and then accept full responsibility for how your career turns out. This means that you need to determine what kind of career path you want to follow, create specific goals to achieve these plans, and then work hard to make the goals reality. Don't beat yourself up if things don't always work out exactly as you want. Things change, and you need to plan time to reflect on your career path occasionally, revaluate it and change course if necessary.

CHAPTER 8: MANAGE YOUR BRAND WITHIN YOUR ORGANIZATION

While you may not think of it this way, the impression you create on other people within your organization will significantly affect how well you will succeed as a DBA. In other words, how the people you work with view you as a person can make all the difference between being an average DBA and being an Exceptional DBA.

I've worked with DBAs of wide-ranging ability and attitude. I've worked with people who always show up to work on time, don't mind staying late if they have to, constantly work hard to keep up with the ever-changing world of technology, and always follow through with whatever they promise to do. Conversely, I've also worked with several DBAs who come to work late, create a big scene if they have to stay late, know more about DOS than anyone else in the company, and can't be depended upon to follow-through with tasks that are assigned to them.

Which of these two types of DBA would you prefer to work with? Which of these DBAs has the potential to be an Exceptional DBA? In this case, the answer is obvious. Most people, however, fall within these two extremes of behavior, standing out neither as an Exceptional DBA, nor as a DBA that you would cross the building to avoid. In this chapter, we will explore some of the habits and attitudes that will help you develop a good reputation wherever you work, and move you towards the "Exceptional DBA" end of the scale.

If you are cooperative, hard-working, reliable and likeable then, of course, many more people will prefer to work with you. In addition, and critically, many more people will also be willing to offer you advice on your projects, and help you achieve the things you need to achieve.

Developing Your Brand

If you want to succeed as an Exceptional DBA, then you need the help of others. One of the best ways to get this help is to create a positive, personal image (brand, if you will) within the company. People tend to be drawn to "positive" people and to want to help them. This is, in my opinion, one of the most important things you can learn if you want to be an Exceptional DBA.

In other words, if you want to be an Exceptional DBA, you need to manage your internal brand in such a way as to present yourself in the best possible light. This does not mean faking characteristics in order to manipulate people. It does mean working hard, being honest and realistic about what you can and can't achieve, and generally adopting habits and attitudes that will help you work well with other people, and make them willing to help you.

So, how do you set about achieving this? The following advice is designed to get you focused on some of the things you can do differently in order to improve your personal brand within your organization.

Focus on Business Goals

How many times have you heard something like the following, from a co-worker?

*"Why did management cut our budget? We don't have **enough** resources now to do our job."*

I have heard similar comments from co-workers at virtually every job I have ever had. When a decision, such as a budget cut, affects you directly, then it is natural to accuse upper management of not knowing what they are doing. Of course, if they had any clue what was going on, they would increase your budget instead of reducing it, right?

In some cases, your assumption may be right. Upper management doesn't always make the right decisions. On the other hand, if all managers were stupid, then most businesses would fail and the economy would sink. However, this is not the case. Many businesses adapt

successfully to changing market conditions, even if it means that difficult and unpopular decisions need to be made along the way. Over the long term, these businesses continue to thrive, producing more profits, adding more jobs, and generally helping the economy.

So what's my point? My point is that, as a DBA, you might not be privy to all the reasons why your organization's leaders make the decisions they make. For example, maybe the reason they are cutting your budget is to prevent massive layoffs. Alternatively, it may allow dollars to be freed up that can be invested in a new market that may be more profitable than your current market. In other words, what you may perceive as a foolish decision may actually be a great decision.

What does this mean to you? As a DBA, your focus should be on understanding the true business goals of your organization, and helping it meet them. It is too easy to focus only on what you think the organization should be doing, or on the goals that are most attractive from your own team's point of view.

If you are facing a budget cut, don't complain or whine to others. Instead, focus on how you can get the most out of the budget you do have. If you are not clear on an organization's business goals, or why they have changed, then ask for an explanation. If you can build a very strong case that not cutting the budget is better for the organization than cutting, then by all means make it. Just because you agree to focus your efforts on helping your organization achieve its overall business goals, it doesn't mean you are a "yes" person. Most reasonable managers, if presented with documented evidence, can be persuaded to change their mind.

Ideally, you want to ensure that management understands your critical role in the business processes, so that you are involved in these decisions, rather than just being told about them. An average DBA is one that can keep the servers running. An Exceptional DBA is an integral part of the business processes and decisions related to them.

There are exceptions to this advice of course. If you find you work for a company of foolish managers, then I would suggest you start looking for a new job now, as the odds of the organization surviving long term are not great.

Be a Leader, Take the Initiative

Many organizations are leadership wastelands. Nobody wants to take the lead or make critical decisions. Nobody wants to stand out, be a little different and move out of their comfort zone. People often avoid taking the initiative, either because they are scared of failure or that it might involve too much work, or because they worry that their peers may think of them as some sort of company suck-up. For these reasons, and others, many people actively avoid doing anything other than what they are told to do.

I admit that I have painted a pretty terrible picture. How would any organization ever grow and succeed if everyone felt this way? Fortunately, the picture is not quite as bleak as I've suggested and, in fact, should be seen as an opportunity for the Exceptional DBA to excel, by taking the initiative, and being a leader.

You don't have to become a manager to be a leader. You can be a leader in many different ways. Consider the following examples of the Exceptional DBA in action:

- On starting a new job as a DBA, you discover that all the disaster recovery-planning documents are out of date. You immediately volunteer to get them in shape.
- No formal complaint has been made, but several users have been grumbling about the slow performance of one particular SQL Server-based application. You take the initiative to investigate further so that the problem can be identified and corrected, before it becomes a serious issue.
- Your company is thinking about purchasing some new management software that could save many hours of DBA time. You volunteer to evaluate the software and write up a recommendation.

- Your boss mentions a new project that is coming down the pipe, and asks for ideas on how to implement it. Rather than leave it to others, you make time to do some thinking, and research, and at the next meeting you offer your advice and suggestions.

A key element of good leadership is *not waiting until you are asked*. If you identify an area where you can help your organization, or help others in your organization, then take the initiative and do it. All too often, people see opportunities to help out, but don't do so because they figure someone else will eventually fulfill the need, so why should they.

Exceptional DBAs take every opportunity to help their organization, and thereby clearly differentiate themselves from those who don't care.

Volunteer for Hard or Undesirable Tasks

Whenever I start a new job, I take some time to figure out what jobs or tasks are critical to the success of the organization and, make sure I'm prepared for them. At the same time, however, I also identify those tasks that nobody else seems to want to do, and volunteer to do them myself.

I've found that doing this can provide many benefits. The most obvious is that your manager and co-workers get to see right away that you are a team player and that you don't mind getting your hands dirty, and working hard. If you perform your work well, then people quickly learn that you can be depended upon.

Volunteering for the less popular jobs is also a good way to learn the inner workings of an organization. The more you know about how an organization works, the more you can contribute to it, and the more beneficial you become to the organization.

A less obvious benefit is that if you master the undesirable tasks, along with the critical ones, then you become the only one who can perform those tasks. This can make you invaluable to your organization, and can pay off in the long run. For example, you will be unlikely to be the first to leave during a lay off, and it can mean bigger raises each year.

Be careful though: don't just volunteer for any "unpopular" job. Only volunteer for those jobs or tasks that will allow you to grow in your position. While you might volunteer to do work others don't want to do, don't use this as an excuse to become stagnant. Instead, use it as a launching point to perform even more critical and important tasks.

Have a "Get It Done" Attitude

As a DBA, you will be faced with many problems that need to be resolved. Never avoid problems and hope they will go away; they won't. The Exceptional DBA regards problems as challenges that need to be resolved now, not later. Likewise, the Exceptional DBA will never complain about a task assigned to him or her, or try to get out of it. The Exceptional DBA simply gets the task done as quickly and as effectively as possible.

Don't Spread Blame

In many organizations, most projects don't get completed successfully, and on time. The causes of this can be many:

- Management have the wrong expectations of the project,
- Not enough resources were provided,
- The time line was unrealistic,
- The team was not properly trained,
- The project leader was incompetent.

Who knows for sure? In many cases, it is probably some combination of actions or inactions that contributed toward the failure. When situations like this arise, many people's first reaction is to start blaming others. Not only does blame not contribute to making the project

a success, it can also seed long-lasting bad feeling among many different people in the company.

The Exceptional DBA doesn't spread blame. In fact, if the Exceptional DBA is involved in a failed project, he or she will acknowledge their responsibility for their part of the project and suggest ways to make the project eventually succeed, assuming it hasn't been cancelled. The Exceptional DBA realizes that spreading blame never helps, and does his or her best to make the project a success.

Accept Responsibility

There is no such thing as a perfect DBA. Everyone makes mistakes. The difference between most DBAs and the Exceptional DBA is that the Exceptional DBA accepts that he or she is not always right.

When you make a mistake, don't try to cover it up, or blame others. Acknowledge it immediately and do whatever it takes to resolve it. For example, suppose that a new backup job you created failed overnight and so critical backups were not made. After discovering the mistake, the Exceptional DBA will accept responsibility, immediately determine what needs to be done, and do it. In this case, it might include making manual backups of the databases immediately and, later, when there is time, debugging the job so that it won't fail the next time it runs.

Don't Abuse your Power

In many organizations, the DBA is one of the most powerful and influential people in the IT department. This is a result of their responsibility of managing the organization's critical data, and ensuring that it is properly protected. As with any job that comes with responsibility and power, it can be abused. For example:

- As a DBA, you will generally have access to sensitive data. Never be tempted to use the data for any inappropriate uses.
- Often, a DBA acts as a guardian of the company data, keeping developers out of production data. While this is an important practice, it can be abused. Some DBAs have been known to allow their favorite developers access to data they shouldn't have access to. In other cases, the DBA may prevent developers from accessing data they need to access to perform their job, just because they can.
- In many cases, DBAs have a stack of work that they need to do for others. DBAs must recognize that if they don't perform their requested tasks in a timely fashion, then others may be negatively affected. It is up to the DBA to determine what work has the higher priority (or get others to help determine it), and proceed in a way that maximizes everyone's productivity. In addition, the DBA needs to be fair to others and not do favors for friends if they hurt the productivity of others.

The Exceptional DBA is fully aware of their power, and wields it in a way that is best for the organization.

Help Others Be Successful

One of my maxims for success, both as a DBA and in life generally, is this: "If you want people to help you get what you want, then you have to help other people get what they want." I am not talking about bribing people, or even trading favors. The Exceptional DBA likes to share his or her knowledge and experience, and one of the best ways to do this is to help others. When help is offered, it is done willingly, with no implication that it is a "favor," and no expectation of a return.

For example, if an end user is having problems logging onto a SQL Server-based application, then consider visiting the user in person and offering your help. If a co-worker is having trouble keeping up with his or her workload, see if you can volunteer to help do part of it. If a

new DBA is hired, offer to become that DBA's mentor, helping them develop their DBA skills.

If you follow the policy of helping others when they need it, you will often find out that you will get many unexpected rewards. You never know who your next manager is going to be, and it might be the person you helped last week.

Avoid Office Politics

Many people allow themselves to be drawn inexorably in to the mystery and intrigue of office politics. Unfortunately, this is also a great way to make enemies and cause unnecessary division within an organization.

The Exceptional DBA keeps his or her ears open but, other than that, doesn't participate in the office politics game. Sharing misinformation, rumors, or even false facts, is a recipe for disaster.

Downplay the Geek Factor

Let's face it, many DBAs are geeks. Some take pride in their geekiness, constantly reminding others of their geek status. Other geeks don't even admit they are geeks, but unknowingly spread their geekiness wherever they go. And then there are the geeks who know they are geeks, but try to avoid demonstrating the worse examples of geekiness. In other words, they try to fit in with non-geeks.

Geekiness doesn't really affect how one performs the technical side of one's job, but it can have negative consequences for the "people side" of the job. Unfortunately, geeks have been stereotyped with mostly negative characteristics, such as not being people-persons, not being able to talk in a language non-geeks can understand, and for boasting about their technical knowledge.

This perception of geeks may or may not be well-founded, but it exists regardless. Whether we accept this fact or not, most people like people who are like themselves. If you are the only geek in an organization of non-geeks, it can be a rough ride.

So what does all this mean to the Exceptional DBA? In my opinion, if you are a geek, and you want to become an Exceptional DBA, then you need to try to downplay the geek side of your personality. Ideally, by mastering the sort of soft skills that all Exceptional DBAs need, such as good people skills, you should be able to get along well with everyone, geek and non-geek alike.

Use Correct E-Mail Etiquette

In our high-speed, high-tech world, we are becoming more and more reliant on e-mail to communicate with others. This may not necessarily be a bad thing, but there are special considerations to using e-mail communication that don't necessarily apply to verbal, or more-formal written communications. For example:

- It is almost impossible to stop an email after you hit send, though most of us have probably wished we could, at one time or another. For example, you are a little mad with your manager, or a co-worker, and you dash off a less than polite e-mail. After clicking the Send button, you realize that perhaps you did not take the proper amount of time to consider what you wrote, and its implications. Unfortunately, getting the e-mail back may not be possible. One collogue I work with has set up a rule in Outlook that keeps each outgoing e-mail in his outbox for five minutes before it is actually sent, just in case he has a change of heart after pressing Send. If you have a tendency toward firing off hasty e-mails, perhaps you should consider adding such a rule to your mail client.

- Once an e-mail has been sent, you lose control of its content. It can be forwarded to anyone, and sent anywhere. You probably don't want your honest assessment of a junior DBA shared with others in your organization.
- If you are not careful, when selecting the "Send To" address for an e-mail, you might end up sending the wrong e-mail to the wrong person. I know one DBA who was looking for a new job, and sent a cover letter and resume to his current boss by mistake.
- Many people get in the habit of using e-mail for non-business purposes, such as sending jokes or photos to co-workers. This has gotten many people into unexpected trouble.

The Exceptional DBA is aware of the advantages of disadvantages of using e-mail to communicate. An Internet search on "e-mail etiquette" will provide many suggestions for improving your e-mail communications.

Participate in Meetings

Whether we like it or not, DBAs get many invitations to meetings. In some cases, it will be as a participant, other times as a presenter, and other times as the meeting chairperson. Whichever role the Exceptional DBA takes on, it is taken on seriously. As a participant, the Exceptional DBA listens carefully, asks questions, and provides careful feedback. As a presenter, the Exceptional DBA doesn't wing the presentation, instead preparing for it and, if appropriate, practicing it before hand. As the meeting chairperson, the Exceptional DBA only calls meetings that are beneficial for all attendees, starts the meeting on time, ends the meeting on time, uses an agenda to guide the course of the meeting, and takes notes to document any important decisions made in the meeting.

Make Presentations

Many DBAs are called upon to make presentations. They may be for company meetings, for training sessions, user groups meetings, or even speaking at industry conferences. Before making a presentation, the Exceptional DBA determines who the audience is, determines what the audience would like to learn from the presentation, outlines and develops the presentation, and practices the presentation before giving it to the audience.

Take Advantage of Learning Opportunities

Many organizations offer a wealth of training opportunities to their employees, covering both technical and soft skills training. This training may be conducted on-site by company trainers, or by contract trainers; it may involve attending a training center, it might be Internet-based, or it might include attending a conference. The Exceptional DBA takes advantage of all the training opportunities that are available. There is no such thing as an over-trained DBA.

Use Technology to make you More Productive

One thing that I have noticed about many experienced DBAs is that they tend to write their own scripts or applications to help make their jobs easier. If you have time, and there is no budget for commercial tools, then this may well be your only option.

However, in my opinion, too many DBAs are overly-reliant on their own scripts and applications. These tools often turn out not to fully fit the required purpose, or are hard to use, or need constantly updating to fix bugs or to provide more features, and often aren't easily transferred to others. In other words, when you leave your job, whoever replaces you most likely won't be able to use the tools you created, and will have to go without, or have to write their own, which is a huge productivity drain.

In my experience, most DBAs can boost their productivity by making optimal use of not only the native SQL Server tools, but also by the available commercial, third-party tools. In many

cases, buying a productivity tool works out a lot less expensive than trying to write your own, and generally the commercial tool will be fully-tested, with some careful thought having been given to its usability. In addition, if one DBA leaves, then the replacement DBA can much more easily learn the tool and be immediately productive with it.

The Exceptional DBA fully understands how to use native SQL Server tools, but also keeps his or her eye open for other options. If a third-party tool is introduced that could greatly enhance their productivity, then they are willing to give it a try. Most DBAs are well-paid, and it is better to spend a few extra dollars on tools to reduce "drudgery" work, in order to free up time for the DBA to work on more important tasks.

Be Internationally/Culturally Sensitive

The DBA community is made up of many different people who come from many different countries and cultures. While there may be a few DBAs who "don't fully embrace diversity," most do. DBAs, no matter where you work, come from many different places, each bringing their unique knowledge and experience to the DBA profession.

It is important that the Exceptional DBA is aware of cultural differences and takes them into consideration. This often requires cultural sensitivity and "bending over backward" to fully understand someone with a different upbringing than your own. While cultural differences may occasionally be the causes for differences of opinions, they are more often a great way to learn more about each other and the world.

Summary: You Can't Be All Things to All People

There is no such thing as a perfect person, so there is no such thing as a perfect DBA. No matter who you are, or what you are, there will always be someone who doesn't like you. This is a fact of life. All we can do is to do the best we can with what we have been given.

Although we are not perfect, we can still go a long way to getting along well with others by managing our own brand. If you haven't already done so, take some time to figure out how your co-workers perceive you. You may discover that you get along well with everyone, or you may discover that you display some characteristics that some people perceive as less than ideal.

If you are not perceived the way you would like, then consider trying one or more of the suggestion in this chapter to help change how other's perceive you. It might take time but if you are seeking to be an Exceptional DBA, then making the effort to manage your own brand, and taking the necessary time to allow changes to take effect, can be very rewarding.

CHAPTER 9: MANAGE YOUR ONLINE BRAND

In the previous chapter, we looked at how you can "manage your brand" within your organization. The chapter emphasized the importance of understanding the perception that others have of you, and taking steps to change or improve that perception, if necessary. You won't achieve this by manipulation, or adopting a false persona: you actually have to make the effort to adopt the attitudes and habits that mark out the dedicated, reliable and friendly DBA. If you do this, then you will find that you can more easily get along with others and, at the same time, people will be willing to help you accomplish your goals.

I mentioned in Chapter 7 that many DBAs are recognized, and well-respected, within their organization, but are not really known outside of it, and are quite content with that situation. However, if you have ambitions for broader recognition, or are looking for a new job or promotion, then it is becoming increasingly important that your "online brand" matches your internal brand. In other words, if someone were to do an extensive Internet search on you, would you like what they find? In this chapter, we take a look at how to manage your online brand.

What does it mean to Manage your Online Brand?

It is becoming increasingly common for people who don't know you to conduct an Internet search to find out more about you. This applies whether you are applying for a new job, seeking a new consulting contract, selling something on eBay, or even dating someone for the first time.

In the context of your professional career, you need to consider carefully what people will think of you after they conduct their search. Will you come across as a professional, or some kind of kook? Will they find a professionally written resume, or a MySpace.com webpage with a photo of you drinking with a bunch of your buddies at a bar, or an embarrassing YouTube.com video of you singing karaoke?

Whether you like it or not, everything that goes on the Internet is available to virtually anyone who cares to look for it. This includes current web pages, as well as web pages that you thought had been deleted years ago, but were actually archived by a website such as the Wayback Machine (http://www.archive.org/web/web.php), which stores snapshots of websites, even those that no longer exist.

If you seek to become an Exceptional DBA, it is important that your online brand correspond with the image you want to get across to others. If you want others to consider you a professional DBA, then an Internet search should portray you that way. If it doesn't, you may have a hard time convincing people otherwise.

Here's an example. An employer is considering you and another person for a DBA position. The employer conducts an Internet search and finds this kind of information:

- **You**: Writes a SQL Server blog that is updated at least once a week; responds to dozens of forum questions in a professional way; has a well-designed and current resume; has a completed profile on LinkedIn.com; has pictures published on Flickr.com showing your most recent vacation.
- **Other Candidate**: Has published numerous, well-received articles on SQL Server websites; speaks at SQL Server conferences, responds to hundreds of forum posts, but has quite a demeaning attitude toward those asking questions; has an out-of-date resume; has a Facebook.com page filled with lewd pictures and posts; has a police report of being arrested for a DUI, as reported by a local newspaper.

Which of the two candidates do you think has the better chance of getting the job? Even if the other candidate is the more highly trained and experienced, I am going to guess that you have the better chance.

This might not seem fair from the other candidate's perspective, but what does fair have to do with it? As we have discussed before in this book, perception is a powerful tool, and if you don't project a positive image on the Internet, then it will be very difficult for you to convince people of your "Exceptional DBA" credentials.

Step 1: Discovering your Online Brand

To find out what your online brand is today, conduct a search on your name using several of the top Internet search engines. Use more than one, as not all search engines search all websites. When searching for yourself, enter your first and last name, surrounded by double-quote marks. If you have a common name, you may want to enter some other qualifying search string, such as a your middle initial or name, the city and state where you live, where you went to university, or even the name of the organizations you have worked for over the years. Even with these additional search criteria, you may still have to weed through search results to find web pages that are actually about you.

Don't stop your brand search at the first ten web pages you try, as you might miss something important. I suggest you check out at least the first 50 search results (assuming you have that many), looking for pages that might include information on you. As you find web pages about yourself, bookmark them so you can return to them later for a closer examination.

As you review the web pages that contain information about you, try to classify them into one of the following three groups.

- Web pages that are current, accurate, and portray you in a positive light.
- Web pages that may be old, contain inaccuracies, and portray you in a positive light.
- Web pages, current or otherwise, accurate or inaccurate, which portray you in a negative light.

Ideally, you want most references to you on the Internet to fall into the first category. Those in the second category probably aren't a problem, but it would be better if they were updated and made accurate. If you have any references in the third category, then you will need to carefully evaluate each one, and determine how they might affect you if someone else sees them. If you have difficulty categorizing web pages in this fashion, consider having a friend take a look at them, for a more "impartial" appraisal.

Step 2: Managing your Online Brand

Now that you know what your online brand looks like, how do you go about improving it? If all the web page references fall into the first category, then you are in good shape and don't have to worry about your online brand hurting your ability to become an Exceptional DBA. If this is the case, you can skip on to Step 3, which explains how you can increase you online presence and brand, by getting more exposure.

So what do you do if you're not so lucky, and you find references that fall into the two latter categories? In many cases, you will be able to directly alter any content that references you. For example, if you have a resume on a job site, forum postings, a personal website, a blog, a MySpace/FaceBook/Flickr, or other social networking presence, then you control the content. In these cases, simply modify them so that they are current, accurate, and portray you positively.

Changing web references that are not in your control can be more problematic. If you have friends that have referenced you in a less than desirable way, on a web page they control, you can ask them to change it. In other cases, you may be able to contact the webmaster of the website and ask them to make a change to, or remove the offending content.

What if you can't remove or alter web page content that does not portray you positively? In this case, I suggest you counter-balance this information by expanding the quality and quantity of the online content that portrays you in a positive manner.

Step 3: Expanding your Online Brand

In the next several sections, we take a look at the ways in which you can use the Internet to boost your online profile and improve your brand.

Websites

If you want to really differentiate yourself, one sure-fire way to do that is to build your own website. I am not talking about a personal website where you share pictures of your family or publish your poetry; I am talking about starting a SQL Server-related website. As I discussed in Chapter 6, setting up a website can be very time consuming but is one of the best ways to create a really strong online brand.

Blogs

If a website is too ambitious for you, then creating a blog is the next best way to build your brand awareness and image on the Internet. Blogs generally take less time to manage and produce than websites, although they may take more work than you think. If you decide to write a blog, pick a subject matter area where you are an expert, and share your knowledge. Don't use the blog to launch personal attacks on the things in the world you don't like. Keep it professional.

Forum Presence

If you are not doing so already, pick a SQL Server forum and spend time answering questions there. In order to boost your image, you will want to ensure that your posts are accurate and professional, and that you decline from participating in any flame wars. I know of one DBA who is a fairly popular consultant who spends a lot of time posting in forums, but his attitude is so negative, that he portrays himself as a real jerk. If you can't be nice in forums, you are better off not even participating in them.

Social Networking Presence

Social networking websites are all the rage now. It seems like virtually everyone belongs to two or more of MySpace.Com, Windows Live Spaces, FaceBook.Com, LinkedIn.Com, 360.Yahoo.Com, FLCKR.Com Plaxo.Com, Twitter.Com, and on and on. Some of these are designed more for friends, while others are more focused on the business professional.

If you currently participate in any social networking websites, I suggest you review your content to ensure that it portrays you in a professional manner. If you currently don't participate, I would encourage you to check out several of the business-related sites, such as LinkedIn.Com, and create your own professional profile and web page. The more you make your presence felt on the Internet, the easier it will be for people to connect with you.

Online Resumes

Many DBAs have their resumes listed in one or more of the many job websites, or posted on their blog page or website. If you are looking for a new job, or a consulting contract, then I suggest you keep them up to date so you can be easily contacted. On the other hand, if you are happily employed with no plans to move anywhere else, I would suggest you remove any resumes from the Internet. You don't want your current employer finding your resume on the Internet, as they may assume you are looking for a new job, even if you are not.

Summary: Start Managing your Online Brand Today

If you have not already done so, conduct an Internet search on yourself as soon as you find time. If you find any content that is less that flattering, and that you can change, then do so as soon as possible. If you can't change the content directly, then put in requests to get the changes made. If your online presence is weak or needs improving, take the initiative and begin building it today.

CHAPTER 10: BEST PRACTICES FOR BECOMING AN EXCEPTIONAL DBA

We have covered a lot of ground in the past nine chapters. In this final chapter, I want to summarize the keys traits, skills and habits that I believe will help you become an Exceptional DBA. In keeping with SQL Server tradition, I have tried to express them in the form of "best practices" recommendations for becoming an Exceptional DBA, which (hopefully) are straightforward and easy to follow.

In addition, I'd like to use this chapter as a "call for action." As with any book, information is worthless unless you actually apply it. Becoming an Exceptional DBA is an achievable task; you just have to make the decision to become one.

Best Practices

In the following sections, I provide a set of best practice recommendations for becoming an Exceptional DBA. However, please don't assume that they form an A-to-Z path to reaching that goal. You don't need to have every single skill or trait that I cover here in order to become an Exceptional DBA. You need to review each best practice and evaluate its relevance to you, both as a person and as a DBA. Some of the best practices will seem obvious to you, and most likely will be easy for you to achieve. Other recommendations may be a poor fit for you, or very difficult to achieve. There are many different paths to becoming an Exceptional DBA. You just have to pick the path that works best for you, and follow it.

Character Traits

- Exceptional DBAs are not defined by how much they know about SQL Server, but by their actions. More specifically, the Exceptional DBA:

    o Has a "get it done attitude"
    o Accepts responsibility for his or her actions
    o Doesn't blame others, or circumstances, to excuse themselves from problems they face
    o Is professional
    o Is trustworthy
    o Is completely dependable and reliable
    o Enjoys challenges
    o Enjoys problem solving
    o Enjoys technology
    o Embraces change
    o Is good with details
    o Is flexible and able to compromise
    o Is patient with everyone, even when others don't deserve it
    o Is enthusiastic about their job and career
    o Is self-confident in their skills

- Exceptional DBAs not only enjoy learning, they are lifelong learners. They take every available opportunity to maintain and broaden their skill sets.

- Exceptional DBAs share their knowledge freely, with other people in their organization, with the SQL Server community at large and, when possible, by mentoring new DBAs.

- Exceptional DBAs become DBAs because they enjoy their work. It is challenging, changing, and fast-paced. In most cases, they are DBAs not just because they can earn a good living at it, but because they enjoy what they do.

Hard Skills

- DBAs are tasked with protecting an organization's data. The Exceptional DBA fully understands this responsibility and takes it very seriously.

- The Exceptional DBA is not content to master just the fundamentals of SQL Server. He or she also specializes in one or more areas, and comes to know them "inside and out." These specialist areas can include System Administration, Database Design, Development, High Availability, Business Intelligence, Report Writing, among others.

- Exceptional DBAs know that in order to fully understand and troubleshoot SQL Server, they must have a good understanding of computer hardware, operating systems, networking, and best practices.

- Exceptional DBAs must master the tools of the trade. This includes both the tools provided with SQL Server, and any third-party tools they can use to boost their productivity and help ensure the integrity of the data they protect.

- While not a requirement, most Exceptional DBAs have a four-year degree, which may or may not be in information technology. Completing a university degree, no matter the subject, is a strong indicator that an individual is able to learn and survive in a challenging environment.

- Although not a requirement, many Exceptional DBAs will have one or more professional certifications. Not only does this help the DBA gain a wider knowledge of SQL Server, it also helps to demonstrate to others how seriously they are committed to their career.

- It takes time to become an Exceptional DBA. Actual production experience is the best teacher of all, and is one of the most important things employers or customers look for when hiring a DBA.

- Many DBAs have the opportunity to lead projects. The Exceptional DBA has good project management skills and knows how to lead a team to project success.

- Whether we like it or not, DBAs are becoming more and more involved with legal issues. The Exceptional DBAs ensure that they understand their legal responsibilities.

Soft Skills

- Exceptional DBAs work with many different people, in many different departments of their organization, from clerks all the way to CEOs. They know how to work well with others, even those they may not personally like.

- Many DBA tasks are done alone, while others are performed as part of a team. The Exceptional DBA is equally at home in either situation.

- DBAs often have to write reports, proposals and documentation. In addition, they may have to chair meetings, make presentations, or train others. The Exceptional

DBA has excellent writing and verbal communication skills.

- As a DBA, you must *communicate* effectively. Communication does not just mean talking to your team members and boss. It includes writing effective emails, status reports, check lists, documentation, presentations and database diagrams. Even that is no longer enough; you must ensure that the company, as a whole, understands what you are doing and how your work contributes to the business.

- As an important adjunct to having good writing and verbal communication skills, Exceptional DBAs are also good listeners. Often, the person requesting the services of the DBA really doesn't know how to formulate their request properly and accurately. The Exceptional DBA listens carefully and asks the right questions in order to find out what the user really needs.

- Exceptional DBAs are often leaders. They may be a leader in the formal role of a manager, or they may be a leader in terms of initiating new ideas and actions within an organization.

- Most DBAs are overworked and underappreciated. In order to keep up with the many tasks they need to perform, the Exceptional DBA knows how to manage time well.

- Exceptional DBAs understand that the world, their organization, and their job is not perfect. They have realistic expectations and roll with the punches when necessary. On the other hand, the Exceptional DBA knows when to take a strong stand, and how to defend his or her position robustly, but appropriately.

Branding

- Exceptional DBAs know that in order to accomplish their goals, they need the help of others. They take control of their own personal branding within their organization so that people fully understand what they are about, and where they are coming from. Some of the ways they accomplish this include:

  o Focusing on business goals
  o Being a leader and taking the initiative
  o Volunteering for hard or undesirable tasks
  o Having a get it done attitude
  o Not blaming others
  o Accepting responsibility
  o Not abusing their power
  o Helping others be successful
  o By not playing office politics
  o Understanding the "geek factor" and how it affects others
  o Adopting good e-mail etiquette
  o Fully participating in meetings
  o Making good presentations
  o Having International/Cultural Sensitivity
  o Using technology and tools to become more productive

- Exceptional DBAs also realize the importance of managing their online brand and takes steps to ensure that their online branding is as positive as possible. Some of the

ways they do this include:

- o Taking the time to evaluate their current online presence to determine what kind of image they have.
- o Taking steps to get negative information removed from the web, if possible.
- o Taking the initiative to improve and expand their online profile, where they can, by supplying content that positively displays their skills, experience, and professionalism.

Career Management

- Exceptional DBAs take control of their careers, rather than let their career control them.

- Exceptional DBAs decide what they want from their career, and take actions to make it happen.

- Exceptional DBAs know how to set realistic, short-term goals in order to reach major milestones in their career plan.

- Exceptional DBAs know that if they don't follow through with their goals, then nobody else will do it for them. They are self-motivated and ready for action.

- Exceptional DBAs realize that career plans and goals can change, and regularly reevaluate and revise their career path.

Summary: The GOYA Principle

When I was at university, I took a class in management, taught by the Dean of the business department. The Dean showed us a movie, mysteriously titled GOYA. It was one of those cheaply made management-training films that many of you have probably seen at some time or another. However, unlike most of the training films I have seen, this one has stuck with me for many years.

You might be familiar with a famous Spanish painter by the name of Goya, and most of the audience assumed that the movie was going to draw some parallels between good management practices and Goya's paintings or painting techniques. As the film proceeded, the artist Goya was never mentioned. Instead, we were confronted with many badly-acted scenes showing lazy workers going about their work, but mainly accomplishing nothing. This got a little boring very quickly and was not very inspiring.

At the end of the film, it cut to a screen with the letters GOYA displayed in large type. Some of the audience were shooting each other puzzled looks, when the film suddenly cut to very final screen that said, "Get Off Your Ass!"

This was a surprise ending to the film, but it made an important point that I want to share with you. The point is that if you want to be an Exceptional DBA, you can't wait until it happens to you, because it won't. If you want to be an Exceptional DBA, you must get off your ass and make it happen. Nobody is going to help you. There is no magic pixie dust.

More specifically, you need to:

- Decide what you want out of your career as a DBA
- Develop specific goals that describe how you intend to attain your career plans
- Take action today, no matter how small, to accomplish your goals
- Revaluate and revise your goals as necessary

- Don't give up

Don't wait. Start right now. After finishing this book, immediately take some small step to get yourself going. It might be making a forum post, reading an article or blog on SQL Server, reading a chapter of a SQL Server book that has been collecting dust on a shelf, writing down your career plans, or signing up to take a class. Whatever action you decide to take, do it now, today, before you lose your motivation. I can tell you from personal experience, if you want to accomplish a major life goal, the only way to attain it is through hard work and perseverance.