inside:
MOTD
BY ROB KOLSTAD

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Catching Up

Maybe it's one of those age-and-stage things, maybe it's coincidence, maybe it's a universal truth, but I'm noticing a lot of people around me in a sort of "catch up" mode. They are trying to execute long-postponed tasks, reduce their important-but-not-urgent task list, and generally shed some of the extra load that keeps them from being able to end time periods (days, weeks, months) with a feeling of completion and happiness instead of a feeling of burden and dread.

I'm doing this myself. Starting with the holidays, I've reduced my willingness to sign up for "just a day or two" of this or that volunteer work or projects. I've reduced my mailbox (which holds the majority of my small task reminders) by a factor of 3 and continue to reduce it each day. I've completed the re-launch of the taxonomy Web page (this would be formally "The Sysadmin Book of Knowledge" pages at *http://ace.delos.com/taxongate*). I've had the luxury of taking the time to automate many of those annoying little tasks that only requiring typing three (or four or five or . . .) commands to make something happen.

I'm just now beginning to feel un-buried enough to be able to see the big picture. I know this is happening mentally when I can embrace the phrase "Today begins a host of new opportunities to produce results" instead of the phrase "Today is yet another backbreaker that will probably put you farther behind than you were yesterday."

Of course, there's always a downside. Since my mind thinks I'm doing such a great job catching up, parts of me want to find a way to perform ever more tasks and re-commit to get right back in the old hole. I'm fighting it right now; we'll see how long that can last.

One of the interesting side results of the luxury of not having to squeeze tasks into impossible small time periods is the joy of being able to perform them with higher quality. The taxonomy pages, for example, needed a quality-lift for the re-launch. I spent three days trying to "get it closer to right." It was very strange because I no longer had the standard copout: "Well, I've put in all the time I have. This will have to be good enough." I know they're not good enough yet, but they continue to improve.

The same phenomenon has manifested itself with the programming contest automation software. I have a confession: I documented it. I know that the Brotherhood will now be out to get me, but I'm just sure it was the Right Thing to do. People can now run programming contests without my hand-holding and a requirement for continuous intervention. I'm not sure yet, but maybe this is a good idea for all sorts of software.

Upon reflection, it seems I am in one of these modes whenever I change jobs or have a "life crisis." Each time I do better in the long term of not overcommitting and being able to live many facets of my life in the allotted 24 hours/day.

I'd love to hear from you if you've caught up and managed to stay caught up. I think it must be a great thing.