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/dev/random

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WHEN I WAS BUT A WEE LAD DURING the cosmic groovy '60s, there were relatively few tomes flitting about the corner bookseller that could be considered "self-help" books: Dale Carnegie's unforgettable literary blockbuster *How to Win Friends and Influence People,* already a venerable classic by this time, leaps nimbly to mind. The rebirth of rampant materialism in the '80s provided an ideal breeding ground for a vast weed patch of personal improvement guides, and the "me first" '90s were no less fecund in this respect. I didn't mention the '70s because I was too busy coping with hormones, college, and the horror that was disco to pay much attention to what people were reading.

Even though there's (thankfully) not a lot left of the Decade with No Good Name (the oughts? the zeros?), the self-help pathogen hasn't really abated much, although it has embraced additional infection vectors such as blogs, podcasts, and Webzines. The bacillus has mutated over the years in response to economic conditions, however, and now primarily targets victims who are unemployed or just desperately want to be differently employed. There have been many millions of words written on how to find, curry favor with, retain, and slough off unwanted jobs, employers, and employees.

The only libations I have quaffed from this virtually bottomless well of wisdom concern the interview process. I happen to be rather well versed in the fine art of screwing up interviews, and a fair portion of that acumen is the direct result of having taken some of this pabulum too seriously.

Fortunately, I don't have to worry about readers taking what I say here seriously; anyone who does probably has much greater issues with life than those that might arise after putting my ersatz advice into practice. To encourage more people to seek jobs in the UNIX system administration field, then, and thereby increase my potential reading audience, I have painstakingly prepared this list of potential interview questions, based on my own experiences, stuff I stole from the Intertubes, and single-malt Islay–induced hallucinatory meditations. Study well and be prepared for the inexplicable, grasshopper.

1. If you could choose to install any operating system ever made by Microsoft, why would you?

2. Apple's OS X is based on which of the following?

   a. *The Cat in the Hat Comes Back*

   b. BSD

   c. LSD

   d. Iron Maiden's "2 Minutes to Midnight"

   e. *Nosferatu: Director's Cut*

3. What is a "shell" and why is there always one in your omelette?

4. The power goes out unexpectedly and you have thirty seconds of reserve from the UPS you bought on eBay to shut down your UNIX machine gracefully. Which command would be your best choice?

   a. shutdown -y now

   b. shutdown now | imeanit

   c. perl -p -e "exec(ps | awk '{print $1}' | grep -v PID | kill -9;

   d. boot | halt

5. One of your users sends you an email request to increase her disk quota. What should you do?

   a. Ignore her and go back to playing Adventure.

   b. Ignore her and go back to playing Nethack.

   c. Pipe her outgoing SMTP traffic to text2voice over the intercom.

   d. SMS a meatlover's pizza and eat it while you dismantle her workstation.

   e. Tell her to fill out a user account modification request in triplicate and email it.

6. Your boss tells you to do something you don't think is right. How do you respond?

   a. Pretend you don't speak the same language.

   b. Suddenly run out of the room holding your stomach.

   c. Tell him you're on break and offer him a beer from behind the server rack.

   d. Hold your breath until you pass out.

   e. Ignore him and go back to sending out resumes.

7. The VP of operations calls you into her office to set up iTunes on her new PC. Which course of action should you take?

   a. Offer to enable IPv6 on her digital picture frame while you're there.

   b. Subscribe her to alt.binaries.pictures.erotica.walruses and wallpaper it.

   c. Set the screensaver to activate after three seconds of idle time (with a password).

   d. Explain to her that iTunes songs can only be downloaded on a Mac.

8. The Human Resources Director complains that his computer is running slow. You examine it and discover that a spyware application seems to be using up all the CPU cycles. Choose the best response:

    a. "I think you're hosed, dude. Better buy a typewriter."

    b. "Your operating system has rabies. Hope you had all your shots."

    c. "What time does that hot HR receptionist get off?"

    d. "See those little black lump things on the motherboard? They're PC barnacles."

    e. "Does the term 'autoimmunity' mean anything to you?"

9. Why are there "man" pages but no "woman" pages? Answer in pantomime.

10. RC scripts are used during what process?

    a. Flying your 1:25 scale V-22 in the park

    b. Burping the Poincaré conjecture

    c. Starting services at boot time

    d. Convincing the demons of darkness to pass over your simple hovel

And, last but not least, the question you're most likely to hear on any given UNIX sysadmin interview:

How did you learn UNIX?

IRTFMP.