

RANDOM THOUGHTS

Academic Seditious

by W H Inmon, Forest Rim Technology

{Warning: This article contains unconventional views that may be considered seditious in certain circles. If you have a very structured, conventional way of thinking about things, please stop reading now to avoid being offended. You have been warned.}

I have a relative who is currently in college. She is doing very well academically and we are certainly proud of her.

Whenever we contact her she is always studying or preparing for her next test. We encourage and support her wholeheartedly and without reservation.

However, the other day I got to thinking about my academic experience. I did get through school. Indeed, I have a master's degree. But I had a totally different experience while going through school.

In order for this to make sense, you have to understand something. I was a math major. This was in a day when there was no computer programming or analytics course of study. Math majors were always considered to be kind of an oddity. I guess they still are today. God gives some people the math gene and does not give it to other people. For me, math was the path of least resistance to get through college.

My whole approach to having a test forthcoming was to get to bed early and get a good night's sleep. I looked upon taking tests as sort of an exercise in doing puzzles. And I am good at doing puzzles.

Other students did what they called "all nighters". They toiled throughout the night reading and scanning notes and doing other things. They arrived at the test exhausted.

In a word, I was a terribly unconventional student. My study habits were essentially non-existent.

Now this “good night’s sleep” approach to preparing for tests in academia led to some interesting results. When it came to history – where you have to know a lot of facts – I barely passed. I knew just enough to get by. I did attend class and lectures and I retained enough historical facts from listening to the lecture to get by. Barely.

And English classes were sort of the same way, along with psychology, Spanish, French and other courses like that. I was a struggling C student.

But when it came to math, I looked on math exams as interesting puzzles. They were actually fun. And I was an A- student at math.

Fast forward to the real world. I have made my career by thinking out of the box. To me, the really interesting and challenging aspects of computers come in looking at things in a way that other people don’t. I have written and published 58 books. I founded a branch of technology known as data warehousing. I am in the middle of announcing to the world another revolutionary technology called textual disambiguation, which is going to eclipse data warehousing in its impact. I have founded a company that has gone public. I have patents. In a word, I am an out of the box thinker and innovator.

When I think back to my school days, I asked myself the question – which prepared me more for life – reciting endless facts about history or psychology or Spanish? Or did having to think creatively during a math exam prepare me more?

Now here’s the sedition. Having students recite endless facts does not train them to do anything more than follow the party line. The person who can recite the most facts accurately gets the best grade. But reciting facts does – in no way – give you a foundation for thinking outside the box. We are rewarding students for how well they conform. The better you understand conventional wisdom, the better grade the teacher gives you.

It has been my experience that the real value of education was in training me to look outside the box and to draw conclusions that no one else is making. And my grades in school reflected this attitude. Teachers didn’t like it. (I swear when I left school my teachers all breathed a collective sigh of relief.)

My apologies to all the academics. That’s simply the truth.

(Bill Inmon attended Yale and New Mexico State University and has a Master’s in Computer Science.)

Forest Rim Technology was formed by Bill Inmon in order to provide technology to bridge the gap between structured and unstructured data. Forest Rim Technology is located in Castle Rock, Colorado.

William "Bill" Inmon

AUTHOR AND TECHNOLOGY PIONEER

Best known as the "Father of Data Warehousing", Bill Inmon has become the most prolific and well-known author worldwide in the big data analysis, data warehousing and business intelligence arena. In addition to authoring more than 50 books and 650 articles, Bill has been a monthly columnist with the Business Intelligence Network, EIM Institute and Data Management Review. In 2007, Bill was named by Computerworld as one of the "Ten IT People Who Mattered in the Last 40 Years" of the computer profession.



Reach Out for a Free Consultation

Let Us Help You Discover The Hidden Potential In Your Data

Send us an email at Info@ForestRimTech.com