

(April 16th, 2012)

If you know someone who you think would benefit from being an Insider, feel free to forward this PDF to them so they can sign up [here](#).

Quick Tips for our Insider friends!

Hey Insiders!

This bi-weekly Quick Tips is coming from Chicago, IL where we're currently teaching our IE1: Immersion on Internals and Performance and Stacia Misner's teaching our IE1: Immersion Event for Business Intelligence. We've come to Chicago several times in the last year, mostly because it's a nice central location, but also because Kimberly is from Chicago and we both love the city and its surrounding area.

The big news this time is that we've hired our third full-time consultant – hardware guru and well-known SQL expert Glenn Berry. You can read the announcement [here](#). This allows us to cope with the demand of our expanding consulting practice as well as have more concurrent clients – exciting times!

The most recent book I've read is Bernard Cornwell's *Death of Kings*. It's the latest in his Saxon Tales series based around King Alfred at the end of the 9th Century in Britain. As many of you know I'm a huge history buff and love historical fiction too. I think Cornwell is one of the best historical fiction authors around today – he's written the Sharpe novels about the British army in the early 1800s (which I'm just about to start), a series on the legendary King Arthur, a series on archers in 14th Century France and the Saxon Tales. I strongly recommend trying some of his stuff out. Oh, and another author to try for historical fiction is Jack Whyte – his *Camulod Chronicles*.

Please [let us know](#) if you liked what you read/saw here and/or have any suggestions for future Quick Tips.

Note: you can get all the prior Insider newsletters [here](#).

Paul's Ponderings

Last week I was teaching the “SQL Server Day” of the SharePoint MCM certification class on the Microsoft campus in Redmond. I always like to start the day with an open Q&A session and this one lasted for a few hours! My typical plan is that I write a list of everything the SharePoint gurus want to know about SQL Server that I don't cover in my slide deck (which is logging/recovery, backup/restore, and HA/DR) and then I open the floor.

This time, there was a new and interesting topic of discussion. The question was ‘why are DBAs so grumpy all the time?’ This really took me by surprise, and then a few other people in the room (of 27) agreed. So I wrote it down and eventually got to it as I worked down the list of topics.

My explanation started by writing the old “DBA = Default Blame Acceptor” on the whiteboard, which got a round of laughs, and then explaining how performance issues with applications involving a database are often attributed to something being wrong with the database server first. SQL Server is guilty until proven innocent, which makes DBAs grumpy.

I can imagine SharePoint admins complaining about SQL Server being the cause of poor SharePoint performance, when really the cause is that SharePoint makes poor use of SQL Server: from the use of random GUIDs as cluster keys to having MAXDOP=1 hints on many of their sprocs, and finally through the weird database maintenance practices it has.

I touched somewhat on poor vendor guidance back in the first February [newsletter](#), and poor use of SQL Server really goes hand-in-hand with that. People not understanding the best way to perform a task using SQL Server leads to poor T-SQL programming practices, RBAR (row-by-agonizing-row) application data processing, useless nonclustered indexes, and many other causes of poor performance. I’m not saying that SharePoint has all of these things but I do think that it’s things like these that causes SQL Server to get blamed (and subsequently make the DBAs be grumpy).

Is the root cause of the problem really SQL Server? Many times the answer is no – it’s the *use* of SQL Server that is incorrect in some way that causes things to run slowly. Having said that though, how SQL Server does things is NOT always obvious (far from it) and so more testing is required. Unfortunately, it’s not always done.

Often code is just ‘thrown over the wall’ from development and the DBA has to get it to run, get it to run reliably, and get it to run quickly – which should be responsibility of the developers/testers.

No wonder DBAs are often seen as grumpy!

But consider this if you’re a DBA – have you ever tried to educate the developers on the best practices to use? Have you put together a set of test primitives that can be used to measure response times through portions of the end-to-end application so people can tell where the bottleneck is? Have you figured out how to show the SAN admin that SQL Server is seeing long I/O latencies but isn’t issuing huge amounts of I/O? Have you shown them what you know? Have you cross-trained them? Have you sat down and really chatted with them about what does work and what doesn’t – and why? A little education can go a long way to warding off people blaming the database server.

At some clients I’ve seen monitors in the middle of the office displaying real-time metrics about the database server and other parts of the infrastructure. This brings all the performance metrics out in the open so everyone can see where a bottleneck is if one develops and because the information is out there, it allows collaborative discussions rather than getting into the blame game.

Call to action for non-DBAs: Next time you're going to blame the database server for a problem, think long and hard about *why* you think it's the database server and not some other part of the environment, and be prepared to explain what you've done that shows it's the database server. "Innocent until proven guilty", not the other way around: the DBA shouldn't always have to prove why it *isn't* the database server.

Call to action for DBAs: Next time you have to defend SQL Server from groundless accusations of guilt, think about how you can prevent the accusations next time (using some of the ideas above), and try to put the burden of proof on the accuser. Weekly informal education sessions where you explain a topic to the developers (and vice-versa) can work wonders for cross-team collaboration and make discussions about bottlenecks much less stressful and more productive.

I'm really interested to know your thoughts on DBAs as the "default blame acceptors"—feel free to [drop me a line](#), confidentially as always.

Video Demo

In the video for this newsletter Jonathan introduces the new UI enhancements for Extended Events in SQL Server 2012 and shows how to leverage the UI to simplify complex analysis that previously required additional tools such as ReadTrace or ClearTrace. The video shows how to setup a new event session using the wizard and templates and explains some of the limitations that exist when using the New Session Wizard over the New Session Dialog in SQL Server 2012.

I produced the video in WMV and MOV formats so everyone can watch. You can get the videos:

- For WMV: [here](#)
- For MOV: [here](#)

Enjoy!

SQLskills Offerings

We've extended our "buy in bulk" discount where you pre-pay a block of seats now to get a 28% discount off of full price and a 16% off of the early-bird price. See [here](#) for details. You can even use these "buy in bulk" seats for classes that no longer offer the early-bird price as long as they are not "sold-out."

Finally, we have decided that the following schedule of Immersion Events in 2012 is final for this year! It was a tough decision, as we truly enjoy delivering these and meeting so many great SQL folks, but our schedule is just too full. With the holidays, Fall conferences such as SQL Connections and SQL PASS, and other engagements and projects on our schedule, we just can't add more business travel to our 2012 calendar.

- April 23-27, 2012: Performance Tuning (**IE2**) in Chicago, IL

- April 23-27, 2012: Developers (**IEDev**) in Chicago, IL
- May 7-11, 2012: Internals and Performance (**IE1**) in London, UK
- May 14-18, 2012: Performance Tuning (**IE2**) in London, UK
- August 2012: **IE1-IE2-IE3-IE4**, **IEDev**, and **IEBI** in Redmond/Bellevue (WA) again!

We hope to see you in Chicago, London or Bellevue this year; otherwise we'll plan to see you in 2013! As a note for 2013, we are cutting back on the number of deliveries and the number of cities.

Just to give you a bit more info on why: these events are extremely difficult to organize and they're tremendously taxing on the team with long days and evening events. We generally co-locate these events to reduce your travel and expenses if you're taking classes back-to-back but it's hard to do these repeatedly and keep us/them fresh and exciting. They are truly *immersion* events and if there isn't one in your city, it might be a good thing to travel. Being in a hotel for the event allows you to participate in evening events, network with your colleagues and focus on the class without the usual requirements of being in your hometown.

Also, we work hard to book with hotels where the nightly sleeping costs are reasonable, where you won't need a rental car and in hub cities where flights are cheaper (i.e. Chicago/London). Seattle is a bit of a departure from this as it's not a major hub city but we balance that with the fact that it's during the summer and many of our past attendees have combined their visit with summer family travel. August in the Pacific Northwest is absolutely stunning and we can give you all sorts of recommendations for sight-seeing if you're interested!

So, that's it for now. Our 2012 schedule is final and we're really looking forward to some great Immersion Events this year as well as planning for 2013. We hope to see you somewhere!

See [here](#) for all the details.

Summary

We hope you've enjoyed this issue - we really enjoy putting these together.

If there is anything else you're interested in, we'd love to hear from you - [drop us a line](#).

Thanks,
Paul and Kimberly

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