

(December 2nd, 2025)

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



Note: As an Insider, you can read all prior Insider newsletters [here](#).

Quick Tips for our Insider friends!

We're back! After initially being gung-ho about 2025, it ended up being a very trying year for us. I lost several months being in the UK helping my little sister through the final stages of her fight against cancer, we lost other close family and friends, had lots of hassle fixing up our house from extensive storm damage and as well as renovating Kimberly's Mom's house to sell, and both fought various illnesses (nothing major). It's been a veritable litany of crap with which to cope.

But, we made it and we finally feel ready to be back in the saddle! And just in time for SQL Server 2025 to RTM, the end of the year is looking bright and happy. Not least because... JOE SACK IS BACK!!!

More details and personal notes on all of this below, plus our December Blackbelt sale!

Kimberly...

Well, we had amazingly good intentions. When I "retired" at the end of 2023, I had one course to record and a celebratory trip planned. What I didn't know is that having retired was going to be replaced with a tremendous amount of grief in having unexpectedly lost my Mother. As an only child, I had to also take care of her estate. Between everything going on and her having lived three hours outside of Chicago, it was a lot to go through her things and get her house ready to sell (a house my family had owned for over 70 years). The process was cathartic but time consuming. I can't say I'll ever be "over" grieving for my Mother but her house sold in October and I was able to finalize her estate in November. Death is a part of life but when you're in your 50s it starts to become a much more regular occurrence, sadly.

So, back to the good news. We're both back and our lives have started to become a bit more simplified. We're getting our house ready to sell and we're finalizing our off-grid build and move. And, it's perfect timing with the release of SQL Server 2025.

Some important details:

- We're STILL planning our IESP and IECAG courses that will be **FREE** for all lifetime BlackBelt subscribers. However, they will be updated for SQL Server 2025. And, there will be a new SQL Server 2025 Core BlackBelt Badge.
- We'll likely add one or two new short courses to the 2025 Core lineup (e.g. a course specifically on locking) and, as usual, the deepest discounts will go to our Lifetime BlackBelt holders!

But why rename the familiar Blackbelt to Core Blackbelt? Because we'll be adding a SQL Server 2025 AI BlackBelt in 2026 as well! We're not sure exactly how many courses will make up this Blackbelt as we're still working through the course list with Joe but rest assured, you will be well prepared for all things AI and vector search related!

And lastly, if you achieve both the Core and the AI Blackbelts, you will receive our new SQLskills SQL Server Master badge, coming in 2026.

Joe...

Joe Sack is back in the wild as an independent consultant after his time at Microsoft, MongoDB, and Elastic. We've stayed in touch over the years, and when he told me about his deep dive into SQL Server 2025's vector search capabilities, the collaboration opportunities were obvious.

I'm excited to announce that Joe is partnering with us to create new AI and vector search content specifically for SQL Server 2025. He's been building comprehensive courseware that bridges traditional database expertise with modern AI capabilities.

We've been working hard together through November and the first course, SQL Server 2025 Vector Search Essentials, will be published within the next two weeks! Full details on our blogs and in the next newsletter!

When he's not working with us, Joe runs his own consulting practice focused on fractional product leadership and advisory work. He writes regularly on his Substack at <https://joesack.substack.com/>, where he shares insights on product management, databases, and AI.

We're *thrilled* to have Joe back in the SQLskills family!

Deep December Discounts: Blackbelt Sale!

From now through mid-December – our LOWEST PRICES EVER:

- Blackbelt Lifetime: US\$1,599
- Blackbelt One-year: US\$899

Then, for the remainder of December, we'll go back to last-year's Black Friday sale prices of US\$1,895/US\$990. If you already have a one-year Blackbelt, buy a second one-year BlackBelt and we'll convert it to Lifetime and we'll give you the 2022 Update recordings.

We know many of you have already worked through quite a few courses – there are 1,771 Credly badges out there, including 72 Blackbelts (the most recent was completed last Sunday!). For those of you still thinking about your Blackbelt or wanting to increase your SQL skills, consider using some of your holiday quiet time for learning! You can buy directly [on the website](#) or [contact me](#) if you'd like to use a PO/invoice or if you'd like to inquire about a bulk-purchase discount.

Book Review

Here are a few reviews of excellent books from the list of 149 (!) I've read so far in 2025.

Firstly, [The Fall of Berlin 1945](#) by Anthony Beevor. An excellent, and meticulous book, like his [D-Day: The Battle for Normandy](#) I read ten years ago. Quite shocking to learn just how deluded and incompetent the Nazi high command was, how frenzied the Red Army was in its revenge, and how much slaughter and suffering happened in the final days of the race to Berlin. Many times I was stunned by what I was hearing. Highly recommended!

Secondly, [Enemies: A History of the FBI](#) by Tim Weiner. I really enjoyed Weiner's [Legacy of Ashes: The History of the CIA](#) that I read ten years ago, but it took a while for this to bubble up the list. An excellent book, but glosses over a few areas, as many reviewers mention. Hoover was definitely hyper-focused on the threat of communists, almost the exclusion of everything else, and the FBI seemed to operate as a law unto itself. What I found shocking was the colossal institutional ineptitude, and the petulant in-fighting between fiefdoms and between the FBI and other intelligence services. Highly recommended!

Lastly, [The Woman in White](#) by Wilkie Collins (a great friend and contemporary of Charles Dickens). Another excellent Collins novel (I read [The Moonstone](#) earlier this year), renowned as his masterpiece and one of the best novels of the 19th century: a mid-1800s mystery told in the style of multiple narratives around the same happenings. The style reminds me of Iain Pears' [An Instance of the Fingerpost](#), which I should read again. Highly recommended!

Ponderings...

Back in March in the [last newsletter](#) (almost nine months ago), I listed a plethora of hobbies I've picked up over the years and bemoaned the fact that I barely had time for a handful of them. I also included the following paragraph about work overload:

Being overloaded with responsibilities at work leads to stress, 'paralysis', things falling through the cracks – especially in an environment that constantly fighting performance

fires. It's not healthy, and not conducive to a stable, well-ordered SQL Server environment.

Little did I know that very soon after that I'd lose two months of the year dealing with urgent family matters, and then the lingering aftershock of that through the summer and Fall. Literally in the airport in Chicago in mid-May on the tram from rental car return, about to fly to a wedding in Florida after spending two weeks with Kimberly sorting through her Mom's house, I got bad news, rebooked myself on an evening flight to London, and pressed the pause button on life until mid-July.

Being overloaded with life responsibilities this year led to a lot of things falling through the cracks, including all my hobbies except reading (my perennial escape) and work things like the SQLskills newsletters, blogging, and my waits library.

When I got back from Scotland in July, I'd lost more than two months of summer and with Kimberly spending so much time and energy on her Mom's house and repairs to our Redmond house, our Camp Savage timeline and progress suffered badly, and paralysis set in for a bit as there was just sooo much to do. You want things to stop but they just keep going and seemingly faster when there's just so much to do. Where do you to start? It can be paralyzing to figure out where to pick things back up.

In the end, it was a very stressful time but it showed us how resilient and capable we are together. We've come out the other side stronger and even more determined with our plans and trajectory for the next year and beyond.

But I would do the same again if necessary. Sometimes something crops up that's so important and so urgent that it has to be your focus, to the exclusion of all else. But if such a situation arises again, I've learned how to better manage the myriad other responsibilities. There's no substitute for experience, as in most things in life.

I'm busier than ever now, throwing myself back into SQL Server work, picking up a few hobbies again, and catching up with Camp Savage projects (thermal underwear to the rescue for bitterly cold mornings!) In fact, as I write this at 7.30pm on Sunday evening, tomorrow morning I'll be leaving the house at 6:30am to drive 100-miles north where the first order of the day is digging a 60-foot trench with my tractor for our electrician to run a new line in the afternoon.

We're glad to be back in the saddle.

PS Final edits on Monday night – here's Fiona (my littlest machine) and the ditch!



The Curious Case of...

This section of the newsletter explains recent problems we've helped with on client systems or been asked about online; they might be something you're experiencing too.

A few weeks ago, a prior student emailed me to ask how log truncation works with a distributed availability group. Rather than guess what I thought the behavior would be, I asked Jonathan and then wrote a blog post about it. You can read the explanation [here](#)...

#TBT and Video Demo

Returning next time!

SQLskills Training

Given how little changed with SQL Server 2022, we decided to record a series of updates relevant to our class material during 2023 and 2024 rather than running full classes. These were done as part of our Blackbelt Base Camp series and are available in our shop, and are free with a

Blackbelt bundle. We have no plans for live, public classes in 2026, but do have plans for plenty of new recorded content, as discussed above!

To help your boss understand the importance of focused, technical training, we've also added a few items to help you justify spending your training dollars with us:

- [Letter to your boss explaining why SQLskills training is worthwhile](#)
- [Community blog posts about our classes](#)
- [Immersion Event FAQ](#)

You can get all the details on our [training options page](#) or just go directly to our [shop](#).

Summary

I hope you've enjoyed this issue – I really enjoy putting these together. If there's anything else you're interested in, I'd love to hear from you - [drop me a line](#).

Thanks,
Paul

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