**(March 3rd, 2026)**

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!**

Spring is in the air in Redmond – the weeping willow outside my window doesn't just have buds, it has full-on leaves already! I'm planning to record and release a short course this month – it's been fun collating material and it's been *ages* since I recorded anything myself.

And the big news is…. March Madness $699 Blackbelt Bundle sale!

**SQLskills News**

**Our signature Blackbelt Bundle** is hundreds of dollars off our lowest price:

- **$699 for one-year access**
- **$1,299 for lifetime access**

Both bundles include the SQL Server 2022 updates and Q&A sessions, for almost 170-hours of content. Shop here!

**Joe's two new courses are streaming now at a screen near you!**

The courses cover SQL Server 2025's vector search functionality, fundamentals first and then real-world practical scenarios and production solutions. They're available singly or in a bundle, and the discount code 'newsai' will save you $50 off either course. Check them out, each with a long video trailer: AIVSE AIVSP!

**Joe's also available** for Proof-of-Concept, evaluation, and general consulting work around vector search. If you're interested, let us know here!

**Kimberly and AIJoe continue their video podcast** with 7 available so far – watch them here.

## Book Review

The most recent book I've read is Theodore Gray's *How Things Work: The Inner Life Of Everyday Machines*. As an inveterate tinkerer and builder, I'm drawn to books like these (see also, for example, *Things Come Apart: A Teardown Manual for Modern Living*). I think I must have said 'Well, you learn something every day' to Kimberly about 20 times while reading this, especially during the chapter where he makes a cotton pot holder from absolute scratch (after planting cotton seeds in his yard). For instance, I had no idea what a cotton gin actually does, or that a sewing machine sews with two threads – I always wondered how it stopped the thread coming loose! I also didn't know there was an entire industry making see-through appliances for use in prisons so contraband can't be hidden in them, or exactly how junk-yard/garbage dump vehicle scales work. Hugely interesting and entertaining writing too – highly recommended!

(And I enjoyed it so much, I ordered his later books *Engines: The Inner Workings of Machines That Move the World* and *Tools: A Visual Exploration of Implements and Devices in the Workshop*.)

## Ponderings…

If you search for 'the trap of big numbers' you'll find several ways that it can manifest, including ways it leads to poor decision making, like chasing numbers, when focusing on a big number that looks like it's meaningful is the wrong thing to do.

We see this sometimes when dealing with clients who have extensive monitoring in place but don't necessarily understand everything that the monitoring is telling them. They then fixate on a very large number that must be indicative of a problem because it's a very large number and if something is happening a huge amount, surely that's bad and must be affecting performance?

I'm going to call it a VBG – Very Big Number. Are VBGs always a problem?

As you all know I love to say: it depends!

The simplest question is: what does that metric look like when your workload is running to your satisfaction, within your various performance boundaries and meeting all business SLAs? If you don't know that answer to that, how do you know that the VBG isn't actually a CNVBG? (Completely Normal VBG).

But who cares, you might say. It's a VBG! It *must* mean there's a problem!

Ok then. Second question: can you explain what the VBG is measuring? If the answer is no, how can you say it's indicative of a problem if you don't understand what the VBG actually means?

So there's the crux of the problem we see. People often worry about VBGs when they have no idea what the VBG means and what normal looks like for that particular metric.

My favorite example of this is spinlock monitoring. The numbers around common spinlocks are usually VBGs (especially 'collisions' and 'spins') and typically are actually CNVBGs, once you understand the function of the particular spinlock being looked at.

**Call to action:** do yourself a favor when trying to interpret performance monitoring: know what 'normal' looks like for your workload, and make sure you understand what you're looking at. Otherwise you can end up wasting a whole lot of time. Nobody appreciates a WGCAACNVBG! (Wild Goose Chase After a Completely Normal VBG ☺)

### 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.*

Following on from the last Curious Case, where a client had ridiculously-long IAM chains that were causing performance problems, Jonathan wrote code to find such IAM chains so they can be addressed. I'd be really interested to see if any of you have similar issues, so you can easily run the code in the second post to find out. Get the code to run here…

### #TBT

*(Turn Back Time…) Blog posts we've published since the previous newsletter plus some older resources we've referred to recently that you may find useful.*

Wait stats are the theme for #TBT this time. Here are some wait statistics resources for you:

- My Pluralsight: *SQL Server: Performance Troubleshooting Using Wait Statistics*, that has 4.5 hours covering waits, latches, and spinlocks
- My main post about wait statistics

- My wait stats library with info on more than 360 wait types
- The introductory whitepaper Jonathan and Erin wrote
- Microsoft advanced whitepapers I helped to produce:
  - *Diagnosing and Resolving Latch Contention on SQL Server*
  - *Diagnosing and Resolving Spinlock Contention on SQL Server*
- My three blog post series on waits, latches, and spinlocks
- Our articles on SentryOne's sqlperformance.com about wait statistics

I hope you find these useful and interesting!

**Video Demo**

Continuing the big numbers theme… the easiest way to see what's happening with spinlocks is to use the sys.dm_os_spinlock_stats DMV. In this short demo from my old Pluralsight course on waits, latches, and spinlocks, I walk through some simple code I wrote that will show spinlock statistics accrued over a short period of time.

The video is about 3 minutes long and you can get it in WMV format here.

The demo code is here.

Enjoy!

**SQLskills Training**

We have no plans for live, public classes in 2026, but we've already released the first of many new courses coming over the next year! And of course, all our recorded courses from the last few years are still as relevant as ever.

To help your manager 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 manager explaining why SQLskills training is worthwhile
- Community blog posts about our classes

You can get all the details in 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

[Paul@SQLskills.com](mailto:Paul@SQLskills.com)