Forward Thinking

from the editors

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I am of the opinion that humans are not flexible creatures. We resist change like oil resists water. Even if a change is made for the good of humankind, if it messes around with our daily routine, then our natural instinct is to fight the change like a virus.

Let's face it, all of us thrive on routine—what time we get up, how we brush our teeth, where we sit on the train, what we eat for lunch—and for some it takes a lot to break the routine. If you don't agree, take a look at your life. How many of you regularly perform some task that you dislike (backing up your hard drive, going to the same boring job, eating liver every Tuesday night) simply because you don't want to face the alternative (a hard-drive crash, no extra money for new CDs, the chance that your iron level will dip so low you'll end up in the hospital getting mass blood transfusions)?

I grew up in a household in which Saturday was cleaning day and *everyone* was forced to pitch in, so as a result there was a time not too long ago when I was absolutely stringent about keeping a perfectly clean house. As I've gotten older and somewhat wiser, however, I've started slacking off somewhat in the housecleaning department. A creature of habit, I used to begin my picking-up process in earnest every night at 9:30, darting in and out of every room in the house like a dervish and cleaning up the detritus of the day. Then one night, out of pure exhaustion, I just didn't. And I woke up the next morning still alive and healthy. My house was a little out of order, but it wasn't anything I couldn't handle. Since then I've cut down my dervish episodes to three a week, and it suits me well (I'm also a little calmer now).

Baby steps, I know. But for some it takes baby steps to precede the big steps. But because this is December and a new year—and the chance to make those dreaded New Year's resolutions—is just weeks away, I've decided that 2007 will be the year I make some real changes in my life. I don't just mean switching laundry detergents, but real change. And if I fail in my attempts, then I will work harder to make my changes successful. I know there will be difficulties, both internal and external, but I will face the changes and the challenges head on, embracing the changes rather than fighting them.

Technology

KNOWS NO FEAR.

Can we say the same for our industry in the next year? Can technology face the changes and adapt accordingly? Can

we force an evolution, or will it come naturally? Charles Darwin said living things must adapt or die, but I wonder whether the same applies to technology. Indeed, we humans are the ones forcing the change—after all, technology does not create itself—but are we moving along a path in which one day technology will be responsible for its own evolution?

It's a thought that is both thrilling and scary—the kind of stuff that Michael Crichton novels are made of. Some may scoff and say that humans ultimately have control over the amount of intelligence any machine has, and that we will always be superior. But I would point out that humans are often held back by the one thing that technology knows nothing about: fear.

A certain amount of fear is healthy; fear is what keeps us from jumping off a cliff without a bungee cord just to see what it feels like. But too much fear can prevent us from discovering our true talents and best assets—fear of the unknown, fear of being ridiculed, fear of failure.

Call me crazy, but I'm sure a Web server doesn't care whether it is being laughed at.

I, for one, can envision a day when technology becomes smarter than humans. I think we will reach that threshold when man and machine possess equal intelligence, and then technology will evolve to surpass man simply because we humans can't get past our fears. Which may be a good thing, depending on how one looks at it. I, for one, would never wish humankind to lose its humanity for the sake of lightning-fast decisions or a better way to build a widget. Fear, along with all our myriad emotions, is what makes us human.

You can't say that about a Web server. ☐

CHARLENE O'HANLON, editor of *Queue*, is in for some big adventures in 2007. Stick around and see for yourself. Meanwhile, send your comments to her at cohanlon@acmqueue.com.