WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH, TRUE TECHNOLOGISTS GET GOING

Overview: A failure to maintain systems and keep them scalable eventually causes them to become obsolete. "True technologists" understand this and keep their systems up-to-date and relevant by valuing team members, ensuring that systems can be scaled when needed, and keeping systems, training, and personnel up to date.

The COVID-19 global crisis continues to impact every segment of the world, and last week a very bright spotlight was cast upon states' citizen services. It started when a governor erroneously blamed COBOL, actually "COBALT," for his state failing to provide efficient access to unemployment systems. And then, suddenly, #COBOL was trending on Twitter.

How does a system become obsolete? By failing to maintain it each and every day. Following some discussions with government leaders, I was moved to coin the term "true technologist" to describe an inspiring group of professionals who have risen above the blame and the accusations we've seen play out this week. They are not saying they did not have time to plan and prepare, nor do they engage in the blame game that decides there is a single failure point when a system receives millions of requests at one time. Planning for seamless, scalable environments happens day in and day out in the private sector. And through coordinated emergency management drills, they do the same at the state level. Except some states missed one component of successful mitigation risk and emergency planning: ensuring every component of their critical infrastructure is maintained and scalable. I detail below the essential components of a critical infrastructure and how true technologists support each of them.

True Technologists in Action

People: The most critical component in government today is the people who keep it running every day, no matter what. They have nicknamed themselves the "WeBe's…we be there when you get here…we be there when you're gone." When I first heard this, I thought it was a slam against me as a leader. Then I realized they are right. They survived multiple CTOs and reorganizations, audits and legislative changes. But at the end of the day, they are the glue. When I served as CTO for the State of Arkansas, partners would come and market their latest technologies to me. My response was a simple one: If my team needs it to do their jobs and it helps them with their technology efforts, they will bring me their recommendation for your product. *True technologists value their team members.*

Processes: I watched a news report on the distribution of paper applications for unemployment in Miami, Florida. Masses of people were grabbing forms…and you guessed it…there was no social distancing. What process was being reported on? How do I file for unemployment when systems are unavailable? The Governor of Florida had a logical response: these are unprecedented times and our systems are overwhelmed. And, then Florida began hiring personnel to process the claims. And their platform? It isn't a mainframe. They ordered 72 servers to meet the increased demand. Other states posted a simple message: If you are already receiving unemployment benefits, please call…and they named a specific time. They added a note that this will help those who had never filed for unemployment get through the increased volume of requests. *And then, true technologists shored up their infrastructure rapidly to meet the increased demand, and they hired additional personnel to assist is the human component of reviewing claims for assistance.*

Tools: When #COBOL began trending, everyone was quick to paint the picture of an old, decrepit programmer who was the only person with the keys to the Mainframe Kingdom. <u>Not true.</u> Remember how I directed my partners to sell to my teams who were actually using the products? Modernized tools are available today at BMC AMI DevX to demystify your code and increase your efficiency, velocity and quality for your citizen services. And if you have not identified your mainframe systems as critical infrastructure, and identified your technology teams as essential personnel, failures will occur. It will take time to address those failures. Citizen services will become unresponsive. *True technologists have planned for staffing levels, trained personnel and kept training curriculum up to date, maintained systems at current release levels and continued to invest in modernization efforts across every critical infrastructure platform, including the mainframe.*

What's Next?

When we return to normal in the upcoming months, we will look back and analyze what we could have done better, and what we need to make sure never happens again. Let's start making that list now. *In the event of another global disaster, true technologists will know exactly where to look, what to do once they find their resources, what tools are needed for modernization, and how to make sure they are ready if the time comes.* But that's not enough. You've got to ensure your mainframe is on the list along with the technologists who support it. Those who program services to execute on it should be on the top of your list. It isn't your grandmother's COBOL; your mainframe is definitely not an archaic processor, and you don't have to look for your programmers in retirement communities. Take a look at BMC AMI DevX's average developer community, where recent college graduates make up 30% of our team.

There's no place in this brave new world for apathetic <u>public sector leaders with fixed mindsets</u>. The COBOL leaders and mainframe technologists in the trenches will continue to make the world run

every day no matter what.