

Adam & The Flying Computer

I was about 30 seconds away from throwing the computer out the window.

Glancing up at the merciless clock on the wall of "Computer Lab C" at my university, I couldn't help but question how I had gotten myself into this situation. It was 11:50pm and my midterm assignment for "Intro to Computer Programming" was due in exactly 10 minutes.

And my program didn't work.

If you've ever faced the unfortunate task of trying to write a computer program, you know that even the slightest error can cause hours of grief. Well, my program hadn't been working for three hours... and my patience was highly allergic to computer labs.

At this point, I had two options: I could bear down and try to figure this problem out in my remaining 10 minutes... or I could casually stroll over to the window, slide it open, and drop this piece-of-sh-t computer into frigid oblivion.

I glance at the clock: 11:55.

"Ok, just try it one more time," I thought. "Come on you can do this."

Just as I had begun to comb through the lines of code one more time, I was interrupted by a familiar voice bellowing at me from the doorway:

"Dude, I got it. Duuuuude, I got the code man."

It was my good friend and housemate Adam. He threw a disk at me.

"Just put it in, copy it to your hard drive, re-name it and send it to the professor."

"Wait, where did you get this?" I inquired.

"Suvrat hooked it up," he casually replied.

Four hours ago, Adam had been sitting next to me in the computer lab, just getting ready to start the assignment. After reading it, he turned to me and said, "Dude, you gotta be kidding me. [The professor] wants us to build a search engine?!? Who does this guy think he is? Who does he think I am???"

After complaining for a few minutes about the assignment, we both got to work in our own ways:

I grabbed a coffee and hunkered down for a painful night.

Adam just left the lab.

I knew where he was going, and all the stops he would make. First, he would hit the Asian dorm. Then, he'd visit the fraternity houses, have a few beers, then maybe tell a few stories depending on how much progress he had made.

Next, the University Center. He would likely spend at least 20 minutes there, running into an average of 2 friends and spending an average of 10 minutes chatting to each.

Finally, if all else had failed he would reluctantly visit the sorority quad - home to several disgruntled former "flings."

Adam wasn't looking for a tutor. He was looking to cheat.

Cheater's Game

More precisely, Adam needed to find someone who had successfully completed the assignment, and who was willing to give it to him.

The most likely place he'd find this was the Asian dorm, where kids were better at programming than spelling their own name. If he was unsuccessful there, then the fraternities and the University Center would almost certainly put him in touch with the right people.

This time, Adam had scored the assignment in record time. He explained to me that within 10 minutes of prowling the Asian dorm, he had bumped into Suvrat, a brilliant kid from Hong-Kong. Adam greeted Suvrat with a big smile and

looked overjoyed to see him. He insisted that Suvrat join him for a round of beers. As far as he was concerned, the time spent with Suvrat was more important than any assignment. He knew that by taking Suvrat out, introducing him to some of cool guys and girls, he was truly enhancing Suvrat's social life. Even if he received nothing in return for his efforts that night, he knew that his friendship with Suvrat would become that much stronger.

Of course for his part, Suvrat was overjoyed and happy to be part of the 'in' crowd, and in appreciation was more than happy help Adam out. Later that night, he and Adam would sit down and complete the assignment in 20 minutes.

Nothing New

This type of routine was in fact nothing new. Adam approached every major assignment in this manner. He needed about 4-5 hours to complete them, which meant eventually stumbling into the right person who was willing to help. However, Adam never went out with the sole intent of getting the assignment. Instead, he always made a point to strengthen his relationships before asking for the favor. Occasionally this meant that he would come home empty-handed and drunk, but this did not deter him. He'd stumble in the door and announce it was "time for plan B," meaning he would stay up all night, get a D or a C on the assignment, and - of course - learn absolutely nothing.

You see, as far as Adam was concerned, college was a means to a simple end... a degree.

"College is all about that pretty piece of paper you get at the end," he would say. "It's a testament to your ability to persevere, that's it. And as far as I'm concerned, it doesn't matter how you fight the war, just as long as you're in the trenches with everyone else."

I had always appreciated Adam's ability to win friends and navigate the social scene with such ease. But at the same time I strongly resented him, and adamantly believed that, one day, he would suffer the consequences of his educational philosophy.

And so, on that bitterly-cold night in the fluorescent-soaked computer lab, I respectfully declined Adam's assistance and handed in my assignment as it was. Two days later, we got our grades.

His: A Mine: D

"Damn it!! Damn that man," I thought to myself. "Wait till he tries to get a job, just wait. I will be nailing the interviews while he stumbles his way through the case studies. I will be heralded for my brilliance, my hard-earned knowledge. And he will crumble, reduced to selling crappy Dunlop tires somewhere in North Dakota. As he struggles to shield his eyes from my diamond-encrusted Rolex at our 10-year reunion, he will finally admit that I was right and he was wrong."

Too bad things didn't quite work out the way I had envisioned.

Adam wound up graduating a semester early, and took a job earning close to six-figures at a major multinational conglomerate. I, on the other hand, wound up taking a job that was significantly less lucrative. After college, Adam continued to beat me to many significant milestones in life... the six-figure salary, the major promotion, the wife and kid.

And most importantly - and somewhat annoyingly- I have no doubt that Adam is very happy with the life he leads.

Challenge Your Assumptions

The point of this story is certainly NOT to encourage you to cheat your way through life. Cheating is morally wrong, and - many times - it does catch up to you. If Adam had been caught, he would have likely been expelled and probably wouldn't have gotten any kind of job.

It is, however, highly likely that at some point in your life, you've felt like I felt in college.

You've seen people achieve success due to who they know, and not what they know.

You've witnessed first-hand how incredibly powerful social networks can be, and that sometimes they may afford great opportunities to people who truly don't deserve those opportunities... or do they?

If you've read The Prologue of Social Charm's Core Program, you're certainly familiar with the myth of "The Way Things Are Supposed To Be." In my college days, I had certainly fallen prey to that myth, fervently believing that my ability to balance accounting books or recite the components of a country's Gross Domestic Product would lead me to success.

Yet through my experiences with people like Adam, I quickly came to two valuable understandings, both of which are core to Social Charm's training philosophy:

- You can only make things the way they are "supposed to be" if you first embrace "the way things are."

In this case, I had been under the assumption that it really mattered how much of what was taught in class I learned - that somehow that extra knowledge would put me in a better position to get a job.

The fact of the matter is that a) in most non-technical job interviews, they don't expect you to know anything in particular - they'll either train you or expect that you'll pick it up on the job; and b) even if you do know something relevant, if you can't communicate it well or get along with the interviewer, it doesn't really matter what you know.

See, if your goal is to learn for learning's sake - because you think it'll be useful in the long run, because it'll make you smarter, or because you're just genuinely interested in the material - then by all means, study. Being a well-read, well-educated individual brings many benefits of its own accord.

However, if your goal is to get a job, you'd better understand what actually matters to your employer. Of course if you're applying for a programming job and the interview involves programming, having studied hard will probably make a big difference. However, in most other jobs - they need to a) think you're smart, b) think you're enthusiastic, and c) need to like you. That's why studying can help. Good grades indicate intelligence and hard work. Actually knowing stuff and being hard-working does too. But all that goes out the window if you are not able to communicate clearly, effectively, and confidently - ultimately driving people to want you around.

- To re-phrase the popular cliché - It's kind-of about what you know, a little more about who you know, but ultimately it's all about your relationships with those you know.

Even if you are smart, enthusiastic, and likable, getting your first job - especially in this economy - is hard. There are more qualified candidates than positions to fill, and it's often difficult for employers to separate the good candidates from bad. Because of this, and because it's human nature to help your friends, it's those connections that can give you that needed edge. This isn't because it makes you more qualified - rather it is a result of people's limited ability to consider every factor.

Think about it: you have 5 positions to fill, and 300 resumes to look at. They all look similar, touting this leadership position or that work experience. You try your best to discern good from bad, but it's just so difficult. Suddenly, the VP comes in and mentions that his son's good friend is looking for a job and would be perfect for this position. What do you think you'd do? Ultimate Success

See, ultimately your success depends heavily upon your ability to see reality for what it is, and make the changes necessary to improve your life.

That's exactly what the Core Program does.

The Social Charm Core Program was designed for one purpose: To teach you to master the art of reality-based social interaction.

In it, we challenge a lot of the conventional notions about what matters in social interactions, and teach you - step by step - how to master the skills that do matter and how to use those skills to improve every area of your life.

It's not hyperbole. It's the truth. So check it out today: Purchase Volume I: The Art & Science of Storytelling

Until Next Time,

The Social Charm Team

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