I’ve been delighted by Robert Glass’s writing for some time. I tend to agree with his position in his column “Greece vs. Rome: Two Very Different Software Cultures” (Nov./Dec. 2006). I also prefer to work “Greek” style—that is, in collaboration with a few competent, self-disciplined people. However, the larger the job (and the organization) become, the more a “Roman” style is helpful. Nevertheless, at any size, you shouldn’t confuse activity with progress or let foolish consistencies hobble good works.

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The drudgery of maintenance

I’ve only recently discovered that, as Robert Glass’s friend Bruce Blum notes, maintenance is zero percent fun (“Is Software Engineering Fun?” Jan./Feb. 2007). In my first job, my coworkers and I had the “maintenance” task of rewriting a desktop application. Man, that maintenance rocked! The maintenance continued when we ported it to the Internet. I only left because I wanted more. The next job was a government joke. I then moved on to my current job because I was an extremely inexperienced interviewer and didn’t realize what maintenance work really was (although I should have perceived it during the interviews). I continually add products (which shouldn’t even be a programmer’s job) and fix an endless stream of bugs on a system that goes back 15 years. It can’t ever be rewritten, nor can its main architecture be reworked. It’s doomed to be massaged by dreary-eyed code monkeys like me until it slowly dies with our group.

This is maintenance. It’s sheer drudgery. I did have fun developing an add-on system, but I doubt it will be approved. Not only do I now know what maintenance work is like, I realize more than ever that (contrary to what I had imagined before I got into the industry) a developer isn’t always a developer. The gradations of development are infinite.

Now my thought is that I should become a contractor or a consultant. That way, I can avoid maintenance indefinitely. Sure, others will have to pick up where I left off and have no share in the fun, but what’s that to me? 🙁

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