CHAPTER 17

Secrets to Excelling as a Professional DBA

This chapter focuses on developing non-technical skills that can help separate you from every other DBA within your organization. Why is this important? In our opinion, the nontechnical skills place you in the top tier of DBAs and ultimately help you make more money. We have both been successful professionally in a short period. We would like to share with you some of the things that we have done to grow rapidly in our profession.

Be Good at What You Do

In order to excel in any profession, you have to be good at it. There are no ifs, ands, or buts about it; if you’re not a good database administrator, then you will not excel in the DBA role. Just because you’re not a good DBA today does not mean you can’t be an outstanding DBA within a couple of years. You just have to set your sights on the goals you want to achieve and work hard to accomplish them.

Face Reality

Part of being a good DBA is to face reality. Be honest with yourself about what you know and what you do not know. Be honest with others as well. Know when you can do something, and know when to ask for help. And be prepared to compromise.

Accept That You Are Not the Best

You do not have to be the best DBA within your organization in order to surpass the other DBAs. There is nothing wrong with striving to be the best. Understand that there will be DBAs who know more about a topic within SQL Server than you do. SQL Server is too large for you to be an expert in everything. So strive to have more overall knowledge about SQL Server than most, be able to discuss various SQL Server topics intelligently, and be really good at some topic within SQL Server—find a niche that interests you, in which you can develop a deep expertise and be recognized for it.

Accept and Learn from Criticism

Throughout your career, you will perform actions that are not necessarily the best, and someone will criticize you for those actions. Depending on what you did, who caught it, and how bad it was, you may
be heavily criticized in an unfriendly way. In order to excel as a DBA, you have to take in those words, regardless of how harsh they are, learning from them, and move on. Whatever you do, don’t take criticism personally and start doubting your ability or skill set. As good as you are, you can’t do everything right the first time. There is no shame in making a mistake; just don’t make the same mistake over and over again.

Accept That Things Won’t Always Go Your Way

Unless you run your own company, you might as well accept the fact that things will not always go your way. As strong-minded as DBAs are sometimes, it can be hard to realize that the decision makers will not always agree with you. When that happens, don’t let it bother you. Your job is to provide your recommendation, but the decision makers will ultimately make the decision. There are two things that we want you to keep in mind when you see that things aren’t going your way:

- **Learn to compromise:** When it appears that things will not be going your way, then it’s wise to start compromising. One tactic you can use is to figure out what you like about a proposed plan that the decision makers are leaning toward, and then start talking positively about that aspect of the plan. When it appears that you are coming around to their side, try to rally for a little piece of your plan, the part that you can’t live without. Don’t be as aggressive as you might have been initially; just try to make a good case for why the process will benefit as a whole if that piece of your plan is added to their plan.

- **Remember the pecking order:** Regardless of how much you disagree with the plan that the decision makers come up with, the only thing you can do is provide your recommendation. (Most of the time, with good information, decision makers will make the best decision. However, sometimes decision makers disagree with you. When that happens, make sure you document the decision that was made and the reason for it for future reference.) At the point when you realize that their minds are made up, try to figure out how to make their plan better rather than talking until you’re blue in the face. At the end of the day, they are paid the big bucks to make the big decisions. Your job is to make sure they are successful.

Accept That Some Goals Are Not Realistic

Is it a goal, or are you dreaming? They are two questions you should ask yourself during your next review session of your professional goals. Don’t be scared or ashamed to answer truthfully. Most people are ambitious; they would like to achieve more in the upcoming months or years than can be done by the effort they are willing to put forth. However, once you have narrowed down and prioritized your list of goals and confirmed that the amount of effort required to achieve your goals fits into your dedication level, then it is easier to proceed forward with a full head of steam to check things off your list.

Often, we run into people that never start working through their goal list. The biggest problem is that their first goal is often an unrealistic or time intensive goal, like “Become a MVP or Microsoft Most Valuable Professional” or “Become a MCM or Microsoft Certified Master”. Now, becoming an MVP or MCM is attainable; however, it requires a lot of hard work and dedication. If you are ready to dedicate hours upon hours of your personal time to obtaining your goals, then that’s great, and you should go for it. However, if you are like most people and get a little discouraged when it seems like you are not accomplishing anything, then you should probably scratch that goal from your list or break the goal into several smaller goals. Start by joining a SQL Server User Group or completing a certification, or any number of things that you can accomplish with significantly less effort. That way, you start building momentum by quickly achieving goals, ultimately leading yourself back to what seemed like an unachievable goal.