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THE WORKPLACE

Bagwell: Feng Shui for Computer Geeks

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The Advanced Computing Systems Association

feng shui for computer geeks

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Have you ever wondered whether you have something beyond a technical problem – whether you might have disturbed the natural order of the universe? Are you not only unable to keep your machines going, but you are the first to contract each new Trojan that comes out, and when you drop toast it lands butter-side down? Is your horoscope failing you? Do you get grumpy when it's not posted promptly near the coffee pot, or do you scour multiple astrology sites for the best outlook? Maybe it's time to try Feng Shui, the ancient "Chinese system of maximizing the accumulation of ch'i (vital energy of the universe) to improve the quality of life" (Skinner 1997). Some of the advice is common sense, while other aspects should be reserved for the very desperate.

Clutter

The first item of business is to get rid of clutter, as it creates "confusion, shame and guilt" (CAMEX '02). Clutter creates a pattern of struggle in your life and symbolizes your stagnant energy. It's time to let your local computer parts recycler take your 80MB hard drives, 4MB SIMMs, and VGA monitors. Are you the way I used to be and claim to use "pile management"? Who are you kidding? Do you really need the stack of handouts from USENIX 1989 or the \$3 totebag from COMDEX 1995? Worse yet, have you refused to part with shells of previously hot computers – their guts strewn about your office? "If in doubt, throw it out" is a guideline I was told by a Feng Shui consultant. She also advised that if you are really having trouble deciding to discard an item, journal about it.

vi journal

> I bought a second processor for my old streaming server in 1999 and never
> got it working right. It's been exposed to sun (I happened to set it in front
> of a window) and every visitor to my office in the past three years has
> fondled the contacts. I'd throw it away, but it reminds me of a kinder,
> gentler era when my customers and I had no interest in Windows Media
> Server. What to do? The Feng Shui master says to ask, "Is it useful? Does it
> lift my energy? Do I love it" ?

If you are completely unable to throw things out, involve a metal person (one of the five elements: see sidebar). Metal people love to clean.

vi journal

> After much anguish, Kevin pried the processor from my hands. It is now on
> the pallet for Surplus Sales. The stagnant air is circulating again.

If you are a metal person, be careful about helping others. Practicing Feng Shui for others causes you to take on a great karmic responsibility. You should be careful with others' luck. If I forgot to make disclaimers at the beginning of the article, I just want to say I don't take any responsibility for anyone who takes this advice. I have my own karma to deal with already!

Circulate That Energy

Another item that can help stagnant energy spaces is a bright or reflective object. If hanging crystals will raise too many eyebrows around the department, see whether your office manager will spring for a few mirrors. Keep that ch'i moving! Try hanging wind chimes in the entryway to your computer room. They not only help your energy, but also alert you to prying "super users" who are trying to fiddle with your servers! If possible, a fountain or fish pond should be placed in the southeast sector of the office. For your company, this might mean the shareholders would greatly benefit if you can convince your CEO to place a fish pond in her or his office. Feng Shui practitioners recommend plants in the workplace. Aside from representing a life force, they purportedly help with office relations. Rows of plants should be used to block workers from being seen as soon as a user walks in the door. This might have seemed intuitive. Who wants their boss to catch them checking sports stats or see they are *still* reading Slashdot? Now you have another excuse to barricade yourself. Gurus recommend buying three identical plants. For example, if you have been arguing with a particular user you would place one plant in his/her office, one in your office, and one in a common place, such as a break room or mailroom. Don't let them get too wilted or they will have the opposite effect. Coworkers will get the message that your place of work does not care for people – "If they can't take care of this plant, how will my needs be met?"

Last Christmas one of my programmers bought me a lucky bamboo. He surprised me by placing it near my phone, knowing how much I enjoy using that technology. It has indeed helped. After hoping it would cause less calls, I accidentally knocked it over, spilling its water and shorting out my phone. Feng Shui works!

Colors

Colors can take on a meaning of their own in Feng Shui. Described as the Basic Bagua, nine colors represent different aspects of life.

WEALTH (PURPLE)	FAME & REPUTATION (ORANGE)	PARTNERSHIP (PINK)
FAMILY (GREEN)	HEALTH (YELLOW)	CHILDREN & CREATIVITY (WHITE)
KNOWLEDGE (BLUE)	CAREER (BLACK)	HELPFUL PEOPLE (GRAY)

You can apply these in a variety of ways. You might try wearing certain colors to an important meeting. Some dignity should be preserved no matter how good it is for your ch'i. I don't care if you are proposing to a supermodel, orange and pink are contraindicated. You should also not paint your house purple and green (though I have seen it done, unfortunately). Installing blue lights in your office or computer room might make people think you are more Nutty Professor than Einstein.

Watch Your Back!

Though you might not gain funding for crystals, mirrors, ficus trees, or repainting, you may be able to change your luck with some rearranging of your office or computer room. If you come away with one thing, let it be that you do not want your back to the door – ever! You need to protect it with a wall or other desk. Do not point your desk directly at colleagues. This can create unconscious hostility. That guy who keeps clicking on viruses in Outlook may be doing it unconsciously intentionally. Try rearranging his office. If nothing else, he will be (a) really confused and (b) too scared of you to

THE FIVE ELEMENTS

Elements are associated with your year (most important), month, day, and hour of birth. These elements together make up the Chinese horoscope (Skinner 1997).

1. Subtract 10 from the last two digits of the year you were born.
2. Repeat until you have a number less than or equal to 10.

Number	Element
0	Metal
1	Metal
2	Water
3	Water
4	Wood
5	Wood
6	Fire
7	Fire
8	Earth
9	Earth
10	Metal

REFERENCES

CAMEX 2002. "Feng Shui and Your Retail Space." Los Angeles, CA. 2/21/2002

Skinner, Stephen. *Feng Shui*. New York, NY: Paragon, 1997

test your patience further. Remind him that you have a master key in addition to control over his mail and thus his whole life!

Using your personal magic number, you can determine the best direction for you to face when seated at your desk. I was pleased to find that I was facing west. I went overboard, also changing my seat at a standing meeting. When coworkers asked why I had moved from the seat I'd held for the last three years, I giddily replied, "It wasn't my auspicious direction!" (BTW, that was #2 on my 10-point action plan to ruin my career.) Weeks later, a colleague threw my life into a tailspin by bringing me a compass. I had assumed our building was built squarely pointing north. I had been facing southwest, not west, the whole time! There are also auspicious directions for toilets. The one saving grace was that I no longer needed to sit sideways. Nonetheless, I would have rather found I had been facing "great prosperity & success" more than "relationships & family." I can work on my ch'i for family at home.

Another easy item is to avoid criss-crossing wires. You thought interference was the worst evil to come of that sloppy practice. You probably didn't know you were introducing conflicting energies. Depending on how bad your situation is, you may need a few tie wraps or a whole rewiring of your network closet. The door may be closed, but your ch'i is getting messed up right behind it!

You also don't want sharp edges. They can create feng sha, "a noxious ch'i destroying wind" (Skinner 1997). And you thought that unpleasant smell was the desktop support guy. Stay away from desk lamps with sharp edges, opting for round models. If your bookshelf has blunt edges, attach doors. In my office, the earthquake retrofitting did just this. The 2" Plexiglas affixed to each shelf softens the sharp edge of the shelf. This could be the perfect reason to go from telco racks to enclosed racks in your computer room. Give your ch'i a break!

How have you been inspired? Send me anecdotes or jpegs of your most recent Feng Shui change to cbagwell@ucsd.edu.