

Computer Science is an Oxymoron...in Many Cases

By Dick Kuiper

I may ruffle some feathers here but the term computer science is often a misnomer. I have been in the business Information Technology field for several decades and have an observation to share. When it comes to the use of computers in business, computer science is a non sequitur, a misrepresentation if you will. Keep in mind I'm talking about commercial business enterprises. Computers are computers and science is science. In the majority of businesses, the term science is a misrepresentation.

My apologies to all you computer science graduates out there but there is little or no science involved in the majority of cases when the subject of business computerization comes up. I have held every IT position from software developer to CIO and never had to do anything scientific to have a highly successful career.

Science categories include subjects like Chemistry, Biology, Physics, Anatomy, Environmental Science, Geology, Astronomy and the like. None of those apply when discussing the mainstream use of computers in business operations. If you want a solid career in NASA, Monsanto, Pfizer or Dow Chemicals for example, expertise in science is probably a prerequisite. But if you're seeking employment at General Motors, Boeing, Nordstrom, Berkshire Hathaway, Keller-Williams or thousands of other commercial businesses, promoting your expertise in the sciences may actually work against you. It may place you in the nerdy egghead category.

I and many people like me have become wealthy in the IT field armed with just a few non-scientific skills like basic math, logical thought processes, English grammar and composition and business management mixed in with some industry-specific knowledge. Salesmanship and public speaking prowess are icing on the cake.

In my opinion, the educational community would be better served if it would divide the computer science academic programs into two more specifically named fields of study, Business Information Technology and Scientific Computerization. Those would align much better with student aspirations and career positioning. Here's a cautionary note to the academic world: Stop scaring the hell out of prospective business IT career seekers by appending the term science to the word computer when marketing degree programs.

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