

EXECUTIVE INTERVIEW

by Emily Sopensky

ED TAYLOR OF COLLECTIVE TECHNOLOGIES



Ed Taylor, President of Collective Technologies

No one can deny that Ed Taylor is quotable. Just look at the clipping sitting on his desk the day I interviewed him. From the front page of that day's USA Today business section, it reads, "...we're the ones they come to for the hard stuff," says Ed Taylor, president of Collective Technologies." (Collective Technologies, is the new name for PSA/Pencom Systems Administration.)

Since Collective Technologies specializes in supplying systems management services and consultants, the question is *what's so hard about being a supplier in a high-demand market?* Given the current technical staffing shortage that corporations are facing around the world, you would think that the address for Collective Technologies and other recruiting companies would be 1 Easy Street.

But it isn't.

Combine the rapid growth in 24x7 operations with increased customer expectations and with the huge leap in enterprise environment complexity and you get Corporate America facing a shortage in quality technical support. Demand is much higher than the current supply, and there's no quick fix in sight.

Actually, there is a solution; and it's quite simple in theory. Go back to the feeder ponds (the colleges, universities, and high schools). Ed Taylor and I talked about his and other Austin CEOs' initiatives in pursuing this avenue.

Q: *You've been involved with Pencom Systems and the Austin community for almost 10 years. How has the climate for software development changed since you arrived?*

A: Dramatically. This was pretty much a hardware town when I moved here in 1989, although Frank King (who headed up IBM's RS/6000 group in the mid-80s) and I were already in conversation about supplying AIX/UNIX software development talent. As client/server computing began to take off in Austin, the Austin Technology Incubator accepted PSW Technologies as its first company and I moved here May 31 to lead the company. At that time, Austin had to import a lot of talent.

In Silicon Valley, so many generations of companies can point to HP as their root. In Austin, we're seeing second and third generations of new companies being formed. So many of them have spun off from IBM's open computing initiative. In the last three years, the software industry here has snowballed. Just look at the Dazels, Smart Technologies, Tivolis, Vignettes, iChats. And, the venture-funding companies are coming to Austin in droves.

Q: *What role did the incubator, the Chamber of Commerce, ASC, and the University of Texas have to do with the current software industry climate?*

A: ATI had a great deal of influence in getting the momentum going. The Chamber of Commerce did, too, but more indirectly. ASC's done a great job, especially since Cerise Blair came on board as a focal point and motivator.

Q: *Why did ASC's CEO Peer Group choose education as its focus?*

A: The first ASC CEO Peer Group meeting was held about a year ago with 12 CEOs attending. When we looked at the issues that

we faced in our individual companies, it was unanimous. We all faced problems recruiting technical talent. This is not just a local issue; it's worldwide. While it's far worse in New York, as the major mainframe users move to client/server platforms, there's just a short supply of systems management talent all over.

Q: *Does the Austin educational community agree that there's a need to provide better technical training and education to prepare students for jobs in the Austin high tech work force?*

A: Yes and no.

ACC and Dr. Barbara Bolin have been incredibly responsive; ACC already offers four levels of Java and ACC's offering is growing quickly. Also, we're meeting with the new director of AISD computer sciences curricula to exchange ideas. She is already talking about C++ courses at the high school level. ACC wants to work with AISD to provide a natural follow-up to AISD computer science courses. She also wants ACC to provide non-degree training for systems administrators.

The Software Quality Institute expects to have a certificate program for SysAdmins in place by Fall 98. I want to strongly emphasize this: systems administration training is an area where I think Austin can be unique—no other city is doing this yet. No one!

Discussions are underway between ASC and UT to hold a job fair on March 9. Other than that, my main worry is there is no other involvement from the University of Texas. Eighty-six percent of the University's graduating population find jobs outside Austin, yet 96 percent want to stay. Nor do I know of any effort on UT's part to attract local technical recruiters.

Q: *System administrators really don't have a clear career path, or educational path. Do you expect that to change?*

A: You hit the nail on the head. [Taylor hands me a brochure, fresh off the press, asking the question "Did you always want to be a system administrator?"] A true SysAdmin loves to solve problems. There really is no career track for problem solvers. That's why Collective Technologies was founded. We focus on the "Collective Intellect" — where everyone in the company has access to the knowledge of others in the company and we can solve problems as a team.

When it comes to handling the complex problems many of our system management consultants encounter, I put more stock in experience than in degrees. Personally, I want to start a non-degree training program that begins with high school-level recruits. I think that's possible given the enthusiasm we've already seen from ACC and AISD.

Q: *I understand you'd like to encourage local firms to offer internships to aspiring students.*

A: The problem with college graduates is they lack the day-to-day business experience. Internships give students the chance for real-world experience. It makes them more marketable and we get fresh, enthusiastic employees. We have an active internship program for BAs and MBAs in marketing and public relations. We're starting one for system administrators.

Q: *How would a company start an internship program?*

A: I'd like you to talk with David Keenan (VP of our Research and Marketing Department), who has been running internship programs for 10 years. He'll give you the details of how to run a successful program. [See *How to Start an Internship Program* on page 4.]

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HOW TO START AN INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

by Emily Sopensky

1. START SMALL.

David Keenan, Collective Technologies, is currently managing a passel of undergraduate and MBA marketing public relations interns—seven in all. That's a lot. He suggests starting with one or two at the most, until your internship program is established and you've worked out the operational bugs.

2. SET UP A THOROUGH SCREENING PROCESS.

Keenan sends out information kits to all professors who are teaching in the area from which he'd like to recruit interns. The kit includes a one-page poster that reads like a job and benefits announcement. The application process involves getting written recommendations from the student's advisor or professor, completing an application, and attaching a resume. Applicants who make it through the paper process, still must go through several tough interviews—just as they would if they were looking for a "real" job.

Whether the student is applying for a public relations or a system administrator internship, the applicant must be able to communicate, follow instructions, and be a self-starter. Finally, interns must be able to work within the corporate culture. The three-step application process is designed to weed out all who do not fit or who are not really interested. Keenan looks for the bright and fresh—those who will profit the most from the internship. Keenan stresses, "You can't afford a bad apple; it affects morale, especially if you have an entire class of interns at the same time."

Recruit from established academic institutions. It helps, Keenan adds, to establish a rapport with your academic peers—the students' advisors and professors. You can start by calling the following contacts at the University of Texas:

- Business, Sharon Lutz, 471-7748
- Engineering, Nancy Evans, 471-1915
- Natural Sciences, Ray Easterlin, 471-6700

3. CLOSELY SUPERVISE YOUR INTERN(S).

Once hired, patience is highly valuable when working with interns. Balancing their schedules with yours and the project you've assigned them can be taxing, but is essential. You must constantly work to ensure the internship program is organized and focused. Interns normally are paid very little; they are there, after all, to learn. So it is important to provide mini-assessments—even if they are self-assessments. At a minimum, have them complete time sheets and weekly logs.

4. GIVE THE INTERN REAL-WORLD PROJECTS TO WORK ON.

Most Austin intern programs make the mistake of treating interns as inexpensive go-fers. Be sure to find a project that your intern can invest time and creative energy for the duration of the internship. It helps if the project also has career development possibilities. Keenan says he always assigns projects that match the student's experience and if possible, his or her career goals. For his public relations interns, Keenan has each build a portfolio, regardless of the projects they are assigned to. For system administrators, the project may be to work the help desk or to set up an intranet specifically designed for investors.

5. GIVE THE INTERN AN IDENTITY.

Your intern should have at least a dedicated workspace, an email address and a nametag. In the fast-paced environment of software development, any employee is handicapped without these. Not only is an email account essential to communication, but it also makes the intern "legitimate" to other employees. If your intern is going to be researching, it's best to get them on the Internet as well. To help other employees accept the interns into the work environment, Keenan insists that an intern wear a nametag with the intern's name, major, and school on it.

With more than one intern, Keenan finds email essential not only for organizing and making assignments, but also as a training tool. For example, if an intern handles a situation particularly well, Keenan passes on the particulars to the other interns. 'Attaboys' are great to get and easy to spread around with email.

6. GIVE THE INTERN AN EXIT INTERVIEW.

Give the intern feedback on his or her performance. Ask for feedback and ways of improving the program. It is your outgoing interns who help recruit your next class of interns.

THE ASC HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE PRESENTS: DEVELOPING A COMPETITIVE COMPENSATION STRATEGY THROUGH CREATIVE EMPLOYEE RECOGNITION AND REWARD PROGRAMS

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To be held: Wednesday, February 25, 1998
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Cost: \$25 for ASC members; \$35 for non-members.
Location: MCC Building (Southwest corner of Mopac and West Braker Lane)
Reservations: 305-0032 or 305-0023

SECOND INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS CONFERENCE ENHANCES AUSTIN'S GOAL TO BECOME AN EMERGING GLOBAL GATEWAY

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Mountain Systems. The first speaker was Lucille Jenevein, Chairman, Highpoint Technologies addressing the topic "Overcoming Barriers in Order to Produce Revenue". Other keynote speakers for the European session included Haran Boral, President of Clockwork Designs, Inc. about "The Challenges of Bringing Technology to a New Market"; and Michael Marinelli, International Trade Group Attorney for Baker & Botts, Washington, D.C., speaking on "Trade Issues: Doing Business in Europe".

Presenting opportunities for doing hi-tech business with the Netherlands was Mary Pat Dowd of PTT Telecom. Dowd stated, "We want to educate the people who attend on how to do business in the Netherlands. Both Austin and the Netherlands are very involved in technology, making it a natural fit."

Shea Eddins is President of Dynamic Communications, a public relations company that serves Texas-based technology companies on a national or international basis.

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