

Re: OT (was: Re: Letter to US Sen. Byron Dorgan re unpaid overtime)

Source: <http://coding.derkeiler.com/Archive/General/comp.programming/2003-12/2067.html>

From: Richard Heathfield (*invalid_at_address.co.uk.invalid*)

Date: 12/24/03

Date: Wed, 24 Dec 2003 11:21:03 +0000

Edward G. Nilges wrote:

> *"Jos A. Horsmeier" <j.a.horsmeier@wanadoo.nl> wrote in message
> news:<3fe8c6d2\$0\$191\$1b62eedf@news.wanadoo.nl>...*
>>
>> *Bravo. Now we're talking. You know what Edward? For years I've been
>> planning to buy a nice old mansion in Spain, in the Extremadura area
>> for me and my wife when I'm an old sod. I love Spain and I detest
>> those bull fights overthere. You, as you entered this comp.programming
>> arena, remind me of those raging bulls -- furious, outrageous and
>> tactically stupid (read on before you reply).*
>
> *While this is an intelligent reply, for a change,*

You've had a great many intelligent replies to your idiotic articles. Your inability to recognise that fact is part – and a very significant part – of your problem. The fact that you finally noticed /one/ intelligent reply out of the many you've received is a tiny, flickering star of hope in an otherwise louring sky of futility.

> *it nonetheless comes
> from a tribalized culture which can't tolerate dissent.*

Are you serious? There is dissent in comp.programming ALL THE TIME! We argue about almost every (topical) subject that can possibly be argued about! But most people draw the line at arguing with the reality of the observed universe (e.g. they refuse to argue against the fact of the quadratic time-complexity involved in repeatedly calculating the length of a string), whereas you do not.

<snip>

> *It is a typically tribal response to characterise the conflict in such
> personal terms, for in fact you do not know much about my emotional
> responses to this exchange.*

But it is *you* who constantly assume knowledge of other people's emotional responses in your articles. I couldn't give a tinker's cuss about your emotional responses. When you're wrong, you're wrong, no matter what your emotions are at the time.

> *You may imagine that I am all flustered and all upset. But I'd have to ask how it is that while my interlocutors, despite their gerrymandered majority, descend into half-literate screeds and the vilest kind of personal abuse while in the main I remain above (and I mean this quite seriously) both their literacy levels and bad temper.*

This, as is so often the case with you, is in direct contradiction to the facts. Your literacy levels are so low that you can't even read the replies you get, let alone compose intelligent responses. Your language is of the gutter, whereas the majority of your correspondents refuse to sink to your level in that respect. You claim that there is a "gerrymandered" majority of people disagreeing with you, whereas in fact no gerrymandering has taken place *at all* – the reason people are disagreeing with you is that you are simply wrong. And the literacy level of your interlocutors far exceeds your own, since they are actually capable of reading and writing, talents that seem to have passed you by.

> *If I call a man a dick wad, I do it flippantly and in such a manner that is quite obviously meant humorously;*

Actually, when you do that, it's quite obvious to even the densest reader (and the readers of this newsgroup are far from dense) that you have run out of technical arguments and have to resort to abuse instead. It is pathetic, transparent, ill-mannered, and boorish.

> *whereas Richard Heathfield has without any sense of humor conducted a deliberate campaign of abuse in which he's lost his temper in public several times.*

Repeating falsehoods does not make them true. It's time you learned that your interlocutors, as you call them, are intelligent, and are not silly enough to believe something simply because you say it.

Now, if Jos Horsmeier or Programmer Dude were to state something that I didn't /know/ to be true but had no reason to disbelieve, the odds are good that I'd take their word for it (unless and until proof to the contrary arises, of course). You see, they (like many others here, but composing a full list would take far too long) have established a reputation for being right. Not all the time, mind you, but enough of the time – and when they're wrong, they generally realise it and say so. This is how people establish public credibility. Your inability to do this speaks volumes, and consequently I am inclined, purely on general principles, to distrust what you say. If you had a clue, you'd realise this and change your behaviour.

>> *Those folks overhere are sensible human beings.*
>>

> *I don't think they are.*

Your lack of respect for the programmers with whom you interact is indeed well-known here. I, however, think that the vast majority of contributors to comp.programming /are/ sensible people, and I think this *even when they are proving me wrong*, which they do from time to time.

> *I believe they are profoundly isolated and
> unhappy human beings, because they have repeatedly jumped on any
> chance to inflate a half truth and an unwarranted inference into a
> global attack on my personality and competence, one which will
> backfire, because of the poor quality of their reasoning.*

You wouldn't know good reasoning if it bit you on the nose (which, metaphorically speaking, it has done many times in this newsgroup alone).

In any event, from what I can tell of the people who post here, they seem to be a pretty happy bunch; the kind of people whom, in another context, the 1980s band, Ishmael, would call "Glories". There are very few "Miseries" here. You're definitely one of them, though. It enihss through everything you post.

(If you feel obliged to complain about "enihss", you're merely confirming the hypothesis.)

> *For example, they inferred from the use of strlen for clarity that I
> do not know how C works with strings*

No, you showed that you do not know how C works with strings and then you tried to rewrite history. It doesn't work like that. If you want the evidence of your incompetence to disappear, there's a special X-header you have to set. Otherwise, you'll just have to put up with the fact that people can go back and read what you wrote, should they choose so to do. If you want to retract your earlier silliness, feel free, but to pretend it didn't happen is simply futile.

> *and that non-optimized compilers
> may generate a loop to find the strlen.*

Even now, you still don't see it, do you? Even the best optimising compiler in the world can't work out the length of an arbitrary string for the /first/ time without counting the number of characters it contains. After that, of course, it /can/ remember, /provided/ it's absolutely sure that that string's length is not altered between calculations. If you'd been competent enough to make the input string a const char *, a really good optimising compiler /might/ have felt justified in changing the code in this way. But (a) we have yet to hear of any compiler that is known to perform this kind of optimisation, no matter what the justification, and (b) you didn't make the input string a const char *, so any sensibly-written compiler would most likely have left well alone anyway.

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- > *However, as I've pointed out,*
- > *I abandoned C precisely because to effectively store strings I found I*
- > *needed to make, buy or steal a pseudo-object which would (of course)*
- > *cache the strlen.*

You could write an entire book composed of new reasons you abandoned C. The more reasons you come up with, the less credible you sound. It's amazing. You actively seek to destroy your own credibility.

- >
- > *I MADE THIS REPEATEDLY CLEAR in 2002.*

Prove it. Let's have some message IDs from your 2002 articles, demonstrating that you made this repeatedly clear. Hint: Google Groups has an excellent "Advanced Search" feature.

- > *The program in which the strlen appeared was written in two hours*

What is surprising to me is not that you wrote it in two hours, but that it doesn't take that long to run! (Given a serious amount of data, of course, it could easily take that long, which is inexcusable, given today's fast computers.)

- > *in a*
- > *good faith reply to a request by Chris Sonnack, who styles himself*
- > *"programmer dude" and who I believe has obsessive-compulsive*
- > *personality disorder,*

Coming from you, that's almost coffee-all-over-the-monitor stuff. (I don't expect you to understand this.)

- > *because in response to my submission he then*
- > *proceeded to obsessively compulsively address micro issues in the C*
- > *code which in fact proved my thesis...that C is an unsuitable language*
- > *today for development.*

You have said so repeatedly, and yet wiser heads than you (i.e. loads of people) continue to develop in C today. Not /just/ C, of course. But C is definitely considered suitable for development by lots and lots of people whose opinion I would value far more highly than yours.

- > *Rather than conceding what was my claim, Chris started an Urban Legend*
- > *about my competence.*

Don't be silly. YOU demonstrated your incompetence for all to see. You can't blame this one on Chris.

- > *I consulted a lawyer on his behavior and that of*
- > *Richard Heathfield in that year,*

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Frankly, I doubt this. I don't think you're that stupid, even though I must admit your stupidity is of a very impressive level indeed. You see, it is not we who have destroyed your reputation. It's you. Still, let's pretend you really did see a lawyer, and let's then see where it takes us.

> *and this attorney told me not to*
> *waste resources on a libel lawsuit,*

Good advice.

> *because, my attorney said,*
> *internet postings in public access newsgroups have had zero*
> *credibility for many years,*

He sounds like a great lawyer, since he clearly knows how to handle daft clients.

"Evening, Mildred."

"Hello, George. Good day at the office, dear?"

"Oh, pretty quiet. Except that You Know Who was back again. Sheesh! That guy is really round the..."

"What did he want this time?"

"He wants to sue a couple of guys on the Internet."

"What, again?"

"Yes, again. Anyway, he pointed me to a discussion on that Usenet thing, so I read it through, and boy! did I have difficulty keeping a straight face! These guys had him over a barrel, and he was squirming and twisting all round the joint, just trying to keep from admitting he was wrong. It was funny and sad all at the same time, you know?"

"What did you tell him, George?"

"Oh, the usual. I just said that nobody believes that stuff anyway, so no harm can be shown. I even told him that these guys were losers."

"And he believed you?"

"Oh yeah, even though by this time I was having to hold a handkerchief to my face because I couldn't stop grinning. And you know the funny-sad thing? I think he genuinely believes he's right! These guys had really wiped the floor with him; they'd demolished his arguments on every level, they'd shown that he was a fraud and a liar, they'd used strong technical reasoning to rip his demo programs into little pieces, and he had nothing at all to come back at them with except rather pathetic pseudointellectual gibberish. And yet he /still/ thinks they libelled him! Any jury would kick

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this guy round the courtroom and then get him to choose a window. I ended up feeling so sorry for him that I even took a couple of hundred dollars off the fee."

"GEORGE!"

"Sorry, Mildred. I won't do it again, dear."

> *My attorney said that given my reputation in face to face professional encounters, these postings are making Richard and Chris look like fools and bounders.*

On Usenet, you are what you post. Your reputation is dirt here because you have made it so. But I'm glad you have an understanding attorney.

<snip>

>> *'visual basic solves enterprise problems'; don't act like a silly bull;*
>
> *It does so only if managed by the workers themselves.*

Don't be daft. No language can solve enterprise problems, even if managed by the workers themselves. People can solve problems, but languages can't. (That doesn't mean that languages can't be /used/ to solve problems, of course.)

> *You are essentially saying the following: "don't have opinions at variance with the group, and don't assert agency."*

No, he isn't. He's saying "don't be an idiot". This newsgroup frequently sees differences of opinion; for the most part, those differences are discussed amicably and reasonably, and as often as not the consensus is that people "agree to differ", but occasionally people change their minds and do things a different way as a result of discussions here. I have in fact done so myself. Only stupid people think they're never wrong. And I can only think of one regular "contributor" to this group who seems to think he's never wrong.

> *I have learned that Richard Heathfield does not have a university degree. While I perfectly understand that such a man could be a well-educated person, I have concluded that at no time has he had the opportunity to live in a collegial atmosphere.*

That conclusion is, in fact, a fairly typical Nilges conclusion, in that it is utterly false. This is hardly surprising, since it's based on incomplete data (like so many Nilges conclusions).

> *Instead (and I am very sad for Richard in this regard) he was pushed into the work force,*

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False again. Have you ever considered checking the facts before leaping to conclusions?

- > *as I was after university but before completing*
- > *graduate studies, and he learned thuggish and unseemly behavior. He*
- > *learned to be a pit bull.*

False again. I learned to be a competent programmer, something which seems to have passed you by.

- > *Whereas I was privileged to attend university in the USA,*

And yet, until we gave it to you, you lacked basic undergraduate-level knowledge about the time complexity of an algorithm that calculated a string's length once per iteration of a loop. So much for your university "education".

- > *which*
- > *doesn't have the UK's classist educational system,*

Neither does the UK, for the most part. I guess you read too many comics.

- > *and to work for*
- > *five years at Princeton. Especially at the latter venue, I learned*
- > *that courtesy is the only way to communicate complex matters.*
- > *Richard doesn't know how to post with courtesy:*

False. And you gave up the courteous high ground when you chose to pollute the group with invective trawled from the gutter.

- > *Richard has constantly*
- > *intimidated entry-level posters:*

Does anyone else here believe this? I don't think so.

- > *and Richard, for this reason, fails to see his own limits.*

Oh, I know fairly well what my own limits are. And I'm always hammering on them, pushing them back as far as I can. In order to do this, I /have/ to know, I /need/ to know, when I'm wrong. So I pay close attention to the comments made by the expert programmers who contribute to this newsgroup.

Has it occurred to you that you are far more likely to progress as a programmer if you're able to recognise when you are wrong? This apparent inability of yours to realise your own errors (with only a trivial number of exceptions) is probably the biggest single barrier stopping you from becoming a better programmer.

- > *He has no concept of the way in which productive discourse takes place*
- > *when you don't take, and run with, a practice (such as using strlen in*
- > *a loop) which you THINK indicates incompetence,*

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It does in fact indicate incompetence. Not in a student, necessarily (since one isn't born knowing this stuff). But in a supposedly professional programmer, it certainly does. Now, everyone makes mistakes, and of course it's entirely possible for a man in a hurry to whack a strlen into the condition instead of thinking clearly about it and saving the length before the loop, but to do so /is/ a mistake.

If you make a mistake and then say "oops", then nobody cares two hoots about it. If, however, you make a mistake and then refuse to realise that it /is/ a mistake, choosing instead to try to insist that it is /not/ a mistake, and thus parading your ignorance for all to see, then you shouldn't be too surprised when people start to use words like "incompetent".

> *but which was in fact*
> *only an attempt to make the intent of a two-hour example piece of code*
> *clear, written while taking time out from my consulting and authoring*
> *activities and in response to a request.*

That is clearly not true. If it /were/ true, you would have said so at the start, instead of trying to argue that strlen is O(1).

> *And he imagines that my sense of self-worth is based on an*
> *employability which he thinks he threatens,*

I don't give a tinker's cuss about your sense of self-worth (one way or the other), and I wouldn't like to see anyone go hungry, so it's all right by me if you manage to con people into employing you for a good many years to come. I just hope to God it isn't on anything safety-critical.

> *as if employability of us*
> *all is not under global threat by laissez-faire. Any employer who does*
> *a usenet search on a person and concludes from postings anything at*
> *all is simply not worth working for, and Richard, insofar as he thinks*
> *to damage my employability, needs to realize this.*

Anyone who is wise enough to do a Usenet search on you before employing you will draw his conclusions not from what /I/ have written, but from what /you/ have written.

That should be the source of your concern.

--

Richard Heathfield : binary@eton.powernet.co.uk
"Usenet is a strange place." - Dennis M Ritchie, 29 July 1999.
C FAQ: <http://www.eskimo.com/~scs/C-faq/top.html>
K&R answers, C books, etc: <http://users.powernet.co.uk/eton>