Critical Reflection in Socratic Form

By

Victor Wiebe

BUS 505

Victor Wiebe
victor@wwwiebe.com
(302) 722-4538

Cast of Characters

<u>Mauritus</u>:	Manager of Application Engineering
<u>Larrinitius</u>:	Manager of Integrations
<u>Socrates</u>:	Ancient Greek Philosopher
<u>Stevius</u>:	Application Engineer
<u>Udaius</u>:	Application Engineer
<u>Erneius</u>:	Network and Application Engineer

<u>Scene</u>

Ocean of Cubicles

CRITICAL REFLECTION IN SOCRATIC FORM

<u>Scene: 1</u>

(THIS IS THE FIRST IN OUR NEW SERIES OF SOCRATIC
DIALOGUES AS A FEATURE OF CREATIVE INSIGHT)

MAURITUS
　　We have been using the new web portal for over a year
　　now. The web portal is supposed to be one single web
　　site for our users to go to get all the information
　　they need. Yet they still go to each of the other tools
　　and web sites to get their data. Why are they not using
　　our portal?

LARRINITIUS
　　Obviously the team did a poor job of designing it. They
　　are not web developers, they are network and
　　application engineers. They have no business designing
　　a web portal.

MAURITUS
　　Not true! Our portal is designed for network and
　　application engineers; our team should know precisely
　　what it is that is needed and should put something
　　together accordingly.

LARRINITIUS
　　Yet the portal is not used as it should be. There must
　　be some sort of interface problem.

MAURITUS
　　Maybe the team is overworked and did not have the time
　　to put together a good design. Perhaps we ought to
　　consider shifting their priorities.

LARRINITIUS
　　Perhaps we can provide an incentive for the person who
　　comes up with an idea to improve the interface!

MAURITUS
　　Great idea! Let's go talk to them.

<u>SOUND: FOOTSTEPS</u>
　　(MAURITUS AND LARRINITIUS WALKING INTO A NEW ROOM)

MAURITUS
　　Stevious! Udaius! Erneis! There you are! Who is your
　　friend?

STEVIOUS
　　Manager MAURITUS! This is Socrates.

MAURITUS
     Well met Socrates. We have come to talk to our team
     about the web portal they have put together. It is not
     in use, and we would like to understand why.

LARRINITIUS
     In fact, we have an idea to offer an incentive to the
     person who comes up with the best idea to improve the
     portal.

SOUND: CHEERING

SOCRATES
     Interesting, interesting. I am sure your team is more
     than happy to begin to think of ideas if they will be
     rewarded for it. But let me ask you, why must an extra
     incentive be offered for good work?

LARRINITIUS
     Obviously, without the extra incentive, the work they
     will do will be only average work. We need above
     average work so our portal will be well used.

SOCRATES
     Do your competitors also use extra rewards above agreed
     upon pay to encourage their employees?

MAURITUS
     I do not believe they do.

SOCRATES
     And have they constructed better web portals?

MAURITUS
     Yes, I believe they have.

SOCRATES
     So then the relation between extra monetary reward and
     creative ideas to building a truly usable web portal is
     not necessarily present.

LARRINITIUS
     Perhaps not, but we desperately need to improve the web
     portal, and MAURITUS and I are plum out of ideas.

SOCRATES
     Is there truly no other way to generate good ideas?

UDAIUS
     We have used this design time and again, and it has
     always served us well. I do not understand what the
     problem is, nor do I understand any of the complaints
     about it.

STEVIOUS
    I agree. The web portal is fine. The problem is that
    the users do not want to bother to learn something new.
    They want everything handed to them, but they don't
    know what they want.

SOCRATES
    You have used this web portal design previously. Have
    you worked together long?

UDAIUS
    For aobut 10 years, yes. We have had a very good
    working relationship.

SOCRATES
    And you have used this basic web portal design in other
    places?

STEVIOUS
    Yes, absolutely. And it has ALWAYS been successful.

MAURITUS
    The difference is that now the portal is expected to
    hold much more content from many more sources than it
    ever has in the past.

SOCRATES
    Aha, so the goal has changed, but the means to that now
    changed goal has stayed the same.

ERNEIUS
    Well... yeah...

UDAIUS
    But that still leaves us with the question as to what
    we need to do to improve the portal. It works for us!

SOCRATES
    Mmhmmm... it works for you. Mauritus, Larrinitius, have
    you used this new portal?

MAURITUS
    Nnnoo... no I haven't. I do not have a need to use it.
    I'm an engineer, and I trust my engineers.

SOCRATES
    Perhaps you should try. What might an engineer need? An
    inventory report? Perhaps a health report on
    applications?

MAURITUS
    Yes, that is precisely what we do. Those are two of the
    most basic reports that we provide.

SOCRATES
     Then, please, generate a report and see how it works.

SOUND: CLICKITYCLACK OF KEYBOARD. CLICK CLICK OF MOUSE. MORE
CLACKITYCLICK.

MAURITUS
     It's no use (frustrated)! I cannot find an inventory
     report.

STEVIOUS
     You passed it. Look, it's here, click there.. choose
     your account, click, click, click! Right there!

LARRINITIUS
     That was.. a lot of clicks.

ERNEIUS
     Do you have a better idea?

SOUND: SILENCE

SOCRATES
     Hmm.. no one has a better idea on how to improve the
     portal. Even with an extra financial incentive can no
     one come up with a better idea?

SOUND: MORE SILENCE

SOCRATES
     I see. Perhaps the problem, then, is not with the
     incentive, but rather with the team.

UDAIUS
     Hey! What do you mean by that? We work hard!

STEVIOUS
     There is nothing wrong with what we've done. I've said
     it before and I'll say it again, it has always worked
     before!

SOCRATES
     Yet the fact remains that it does not work now. Have
     you looked into web portals perhaps created by your
     competitors?

ERNEIUS
     We're better than them!

LARRINITIUS
     We have, and we've found that the market is different
     between them and us. Their portals do not meet our
     needs.

                                                   (CONTINUED)

SOCRATES
     Yet you yourself, Larrinitius, found along with
     Mauritus that your portal is not useable, and it
     appears to be of not fault of your team. I also believe
     your team to be adept, full of wisdom and sure to work
     to their fullest, and we have already decided that
     extra incentives will not work, for one cannot force an
     idea where an idea is not to be had. So what else can
     be done to help the team generate new ideas and make a
     more useable web interface?

MAURITUS
     Well, we do have more team members elsewhere.

STEVIOUS
     Yeah, they're useless.

SOCRATES
     Useless?

STEVIOUS
     They can't even follow direction! We tell them to do
     something and they ask us how to do it.

SOCRATES
     Do they? And why do you think they do that?

STEVIOUS
     Because they're stupid.

MAURITUS
     No, it's not because they are stupid. It's because they
     are afraid of making a mistake because of the negative
     reaction they would receive.

STEVIOUS
     Bah. It's the same thing. You cannot learn without
     making mistakes.

SOCRATES
     Perhaps that is true, but perhaps it is also true that
     one does not learn by doing the same work repeatedly
     without change.

STEVIOUS
     So what's your idea then?

SOCRATES
     Can you not think of a use for your other team mates?

STEVIOUS
     And have them do what, precisely? Ask us what we need
     to do?

MAURITUS
     No, I see where he is going with this. Maybe what we
     need is a different view. We have two managers and
     three engineers. Maybe we need an other engineer to use
     the portal as a test drive.

SOCRATES
     Would another engineer work where yours have already
     failed?

MAURITUS
     Well, it certainly couldn't hurt.

SOCRATES
     Or perhaps an engineer would show you what you already
     know, only that something needs to change, but without
     knowing what.

ERNEIUS
     What do you suggest? An interior designer?

SOCRATES
     Perhaps. Would an interior designer know how to build a
     space that is effective and usable by the person or
     people using it?

STEVIOUS
     That's completely different. This is a web page, not a
     living room. We need web designers.

LARRINITIUS
     We are web designers.

UDAIUS
     We are web engineers, not designers. We need someone to
     design an interface for us and then we'll make it.

MAURITUS
     So what we need is someone not used to what we are
     doing to help us out. We must be in a rut. We have been
     doing this for so long we have forgotten what it means
     for someone else to need to use our services.

LARRINITIUS
     Maybe it is time to shake up the team by adding someone
     new to it, someone with a fresh perspective.

SOCRATES
     Is that all you can do? What of your current team
     members? Are they to stay and not grow?

MAURITUS
Well... if we are going to get someone with different skills for this team, maybe we need to send these three out into other teams to let them get a fresh perspective.

SOCRATES
Wonderful!

LARRINITIUS
I'm not sure about this. It seems to run counter to everything I have ever done in the I.T. market. The idea of hiring an interior designer to help us build a web site just seems wrong. But what we have is certainly not working, so we might as well give it a try...

VOICE: NARRATOR
And so the five brave i.t. folk ventured into unknown territory and decided to try something new, with people unfamiliar with their work. and in return they thought of themselves trying something new, with which they are unfamiliar, and in doing so hope to grow as people and gain valuable insight.

Yes, even in the I.T. world where structure is rigid and restricted to the few who have schooling and education only in I.T., even here there might be a place for the novice, for the uninitiated, for the stranger to assist and help growth.

When the normal process of doing business is no longer working or achieving desired results, it is time for a change in thought. A change in thought can be obtained by utilising people with different backgrounds, different training, a different way of viewing your problems. It might be difficult to see, and it might be difficult to admit, but understanding that someone else might be able to help is not a sign of weakness, it is a sign of strength of knowledge.

Thousands of years ago even Socrates knew the value of inquiry, of challenging a standard way of thinking. Let's use his teachings today! Challenge yourself, challenge your beliefs, and grow.