



Chapter XVI

Gary Houk

Online Computer Library Center

Furthering access to the world's information

My name is **Gary Houk**. I am the vice president of corporate information technology and business integration at the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC).

Personal History

I was born in Akron, Ohio. While I have spent most of my life in Ohio, I lived in a lot of different places growing up. For instance, I graduated high school from Parkway West High School in St. Louis, Missouri. In 1973, I obtained an undergraduate degree in computer science from the Ohio State University. Later, I went back and earned an MBA from Ohio State in 1984.

During my time at university, I had very interesting summer jobs. I started out majoring in mathematics. I really did not know what I was going to do with a major in mathematics. But, I enjoyed it and I was good at it. One summer I spent with my father in Oklahoma City. At the time he was working for a regional trucking company called Leeway Motor Freight. He managed to get me a job as a computer

operator. The computer was an IBM 360 with a DOS operating system. I enjoyed this experience. So, upon my return to university, I switched my major to computer science.

Also, while I was attending university I was able to work for a local insurance company. I worked from 6 p.m. to 10 p.m. during the week and 12 hour shifts on the weekends. I was a computer operator on their IBM 360. I ran the longer batch jobs such as printing checks. In addition, on the side, I did some program language conversion. They had a lot of autocoder programs that I converted to COBOL. Remember, these were the days of limited memory and storage. So, we would desk check our code because we would only have one chance per night to compile the program. It certainly is not like that now.

After graduation, I worked for the North Electric Company in Delaware, Ohio. They were in the telecommunications switch business. It was a fun place to work as my first job because I got to work on a lot of different projects. Back then they were just inventing touch tone phones. I remember working with some of the scientists at North. They would give me algorithms to program so the computers could convert electronic signals into specific numeric digits.

About 13 months after I started to work at North they decided to relocate the computing staff to a data center in Galeon, Ohio. This is a very small town famous for Galeon tractors, big road graders. Well, this relocation would have meant moving to Galeon, or a 1 hour commute each way. So, I started looking for another job in Columbus. I soon found a position at OCLC and I have been here now for over 30 years.

Another key element of my career development has been my participation in various community related activities. I have served on the boards of various service organizations, including 1-year stints as president of the local Chamber of Commerce and president of the local Rotary Club. These activities have been rewarding on two fronts. First, they have helped develop my communications and collaboration skills. Second, they have allowed me to give something back to the community in which I work and live. Also, I am now serving on the board of an insurance company which wanted to retain someone with an IT background to diversify the makeup of that board. This has also been a very rewarding experience and one which I believe I learn from as much as I contribute.

Company History

OCLC is a nonprofit membership organization that was originally chartered as the Ohio College Library Center, serving 54 academic institutions in Ohio. Very quickly, by the mid 1970s, we were serving libraries outside of the state of Ohio. In 1977,

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