



connexions interview with **CHRIS WESTPHAL**

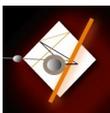
Transcript of the interview with Chris Westphal, chief analytics officer at DataWalk Inc., in Washington D. C. Metro Area, USA.

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Following successful post-production, the video recording of this video will be uploaded to *connexions'* Vimeo channel at <https://vimeo.com/24278192>

How is your present career related/unrelated to International Professional Communication (IPC), which means communication between different countries, nations, and nationalities?

Well, yes, it's very connected and the accumulation of all of the work that I've done... throughout my career, especially in the last 20 years, had a heavy focus on international activities. We did a lot of work, uh, around the world. We deployed our technology to approximately 40 different countries. And so every engagement we went on, every place we visited, every deployment we were involved with taught us something different... showed us something new... allowed us to build ourselves on—or build myself on—those interactions with my... my foreign counterparts.



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Regarding your activities, exactly what is your profession?

Sure, so... you could summarize me as a data scientist. I'm an individual that looks at complex data sets and tries to figure out patterns of interest, tries to figure out things that make sense within the data that we could then utilize or exploit under various circumstances. So historically I did a lot of work with government operations. We work with law enforcement, we work with intelligence agencies, we work with financial... crime units, financial intelligence units. And so typically we would look at their data sets in large quantities, very big data sets—and usually multiple data sets—and then put it all together; and we would then visualize—connect the dots to see patterns of interest. We would look for the anomalies, and then we would be able to take action on those particular patterns.

Let's talk about "the bad guy." Who is "the bad guy"? Would you like to expand on that or not?

Well, it's... obviously very subjective... who's naughty and who's nice... It's usually an interpretation within a specific context. A bad person could be an individual committing fraud, it could be someone doing criminal activity, it could be a terrorist... committing... or... engaging in their... their plots. It could also be something like a rogue IP... where you're getting spam, you're getting, uh, an intrusion from a remote site. So it isn't always just necessarily an individual per se. It could be an account, it could be a transaction, it could be a business, it could be a government. It could be anything that's essentially not consistent—not, uh, behaving as you would expect within a specific domain or environment that you're looking at.

Would you say that these elements are inherently international?

Yes. So everything that goes on in the US... is a problem that exists elsewhere in the world. Now the US, they usually consider it to be the gold standard. We're quite larger than most other, um, countries... we usually have multiple different agencies that address the same problem space... we certainly have a lot of resources available to us. But the problems that we see here are still the same problems that essentially every country in the world also sees. How they decide to address it and how they decide to deal with it will vary, and—according to scale as well—but... the things and the

issues that we deal with here are certainly global and affect everybody around the world.

How have your past experiences in IPC prepared you for the work you do today?

Today, it's probably a bit more of how I approach the problem space... where I want to incorporate different viewpoints. The way I think... or let me say historically the way I thought was the only way that was... Uh, let me start that again. So, the way I think is a combination of a lot of different thought processes, whereas before I may have only had a single track of how I thought of solving a problem space. Having been exposed to so many different environments and the inputs from so many different people over this timespan—especially when on an international basis they tend to be extremely efficient, they tend to actually do quite a bit of homework... and so... know their baseline quite well and are able to actually convey content to me. So... needless to say, I want to make sure that I am able to hold my own, do my homework, make sure that I've got my foundation in place. And a lot of that I learned from interacting with a lot of the folks overseas, because they certainly knew what they wanted when they approached us, when we were working together, and would... certainly hold us accountable to the deliverables that we... had said we were going to make. And so, it was very clear about how we did that.

Secondly, some of the other things that we were involved with is... negotiation. Usually in the US, it's back and forth, you know? I'll offer something, you'll offer something back or counter me, and we'll go back and forth—maybe once, twice, maybe at most three times. I found that a lot of times in overseas negotiations, um, that can go on a lot longer... and almost every time you interact with somebody, it is a negotiation. And so you always want to make sure that you've got things documented... quite well—that, you know, what was stated... is recorded; that you can refer to or look back on at a later point. Um... needless to say, you should do that for any kind of negotiation, but I found it to be a bit more required when I was doing a lot of international discussions.

What other factors would you highlight as differentiating communication within the US and communication with peoples who are not U.S. natives, whether in the US or in other countries?

Sure. Well, I found a lot of times that when I was interacting with the... my foreign-born counterparts... um, they would ask the same question probably three or four different ways to see how I responded... and I can't... can't say whether it was they didn't like the answer I was giving them, but they seemed to test me to make sure I was consistent in how I answered or responded to the questions that were being had. So I found that... found that interesting, because usually in the US you... you answer the question, you move on to the next thing. Um... you know, in certain regions this was bit more prevalent. Not everybody did this overseas, but there were certain areas where we kind of anticipated that, once we answered the question, it'd probably come back up three or four more times for us to engage in. And so we... we definitely realized that that was something that we had to look at. And um... also, they'll ask a lot of—I'll call it more simple questions. Um... but they're not... they're not shy to ask questions. If they don't understand something, they'll say, "Well, what about this? What about that?" And so, um, certainly I would say there's probably many more questions that aren't asked by my foreign counterparts than my domestics.... and now, something that could be... access to resources, um, as you could imagine here in the US—and actually where I live here in Loudoun County [Washington, D.C. Metro Area], 70% of the world's internet traffic goes through the data centers that are literally just down the street from here... so you can imagine, we've got a very big base of technical people, of resources, of infrastructure here that we can take advantage of—whereas overseas... there may only be a few individuals within the organization that might have the knowledge base or the experience that may be needed to help deploy the technologies. And so... they're going to ask a lot of questions. And you kind of expect that. And I... trust me I'll ask... I'll answer any question that's ever asked. I think asking questions is wonderful and, if you don't know something, you should ask questions. And if you don't, then... then shame on you. So I never view that as a bad thing, but I definitely, definitely... knew that they would be asking a lot more questions than... than what I'd see here at home.

Are there any issues with English as the so-called common language? What have your experiences been?

So... sometimes... and it depends on, it depends on who I'm interacting with... in some places, the more formal you get, the more... the higher up you go in some of the government organizations—generally everybody to a certain degree will understand... will understand English. They may not speak it as well as they'll understand it. And, I... I've found that the higher up you go with the more senior individuals... sometimes they'll be a little less... involved in... in making discussions in English. And so, I've been in situations where you've had formalized interpreters... uh, in the room, and it's... it's... you never... everybody's got the earpieces in, and you're... you... you certainly talk a lot slower for them to understand. But I've also found that in some of the technology fields—even with people who speak English quite well—prefer to talk technically amongst themselves in their own languages... 'cause it's easier. There's more meaning that can convey without having to translate it. And... that's not a bad thing; it's actually good, but what it does is... I'll miss out sometimes on some of the details, on some of the smaller minutia that they may be discussing because I obviously don't understand them. And they're not going to come to convey some of that content to me. So, um... and in that context, you know, there may be other opportunities, or there may be other problem sets that I could probably help them address that I may not exactly know about with not hearing or being part of some of their internal conversations. But everything I've ever done has always been in English. Everything, you know, contracts and deployments are always in English, and usually the technical folks—especially, you know, when you get to the... call it the lower-level technical guys—they're always pretty good in English and... there's always a lot of back and forth. Certainly, we have phone calls, conference calls... we certainly have face-to-face... we do a lot of stuff on email. And, um, you know, we always manage to convey what's... what's needed for the requirements or the project.

Have the time differences throughout the world ever become an issue?

Yes, time differences have a big impact. So, I was literally working 16 to 18... 20 hours a day most of the time. And I... we usually found the sweet spot was about 10

o'clock—9 o'clock... 10 o'clock at night... especially if we were dealing with Asia where you have 12 or 14 hour differences. We... we were able to accommodate them. They were just coming... they were just coming online most part, you know, we were getting ready for bedtime here, and it actually worked out quite well, because... when we actually then went to sleep, you know, we could answer their questions, we can get them what they needed to move through the day. If anything happened throughout the day, there would certainly be an email waiting for me first thing in the morning. So actually, I know this sounds a little bit weird but, you know, it... it was almost like a holiday gift, a Christmas gift. There was a little package of email waiting for me, saying "Hey, you know, we have to get this. We've got to get that." And so... I knew that, um, because they were busy during their day there would always be something waiting for me. And since we dealt with so many countries, there... I could, I could guarantee you there was always correspondence waiting for me in the morning. And I didn't view that as a bad thing; I actually view that as a good thing. And... and then we could get that addressed while they were sleeping, and when they came back to work everything, you know, we could post a new bill, we could answer the questions, we could give them a different configuration. So it actually worked out quite well, and... we actually found it... found it fairly efficient... and a good process to work.

What are some key contributions of IPC research that you would highlight?

What I'd rather do here is I'd rather, I think, talk about... maybe how technology applies... and that will incorporate some of the research. So, let's, let's talk it from that perspective, okay? So, you know, some of the key contributions of IPC research... technology is an equalizer. You know, the stuff that I do on my... on my computer is the same thing that everybody else does on their computers. Um, you know, we all use email, we all use Web browsers. And so technology makes us equal, because I'm not doing things that other people aren't able to do. And I think what we've seen in... in actually the fairly recent... in the last... call it 2 to 5 years, we've seen a lot of language translation software, so even when things do need to be converted, we can bring up translation software. And not only just translation software of printed documents like the Google® translation, but actually real-time

voice; so I can speak a phrase, tell it which language I want it to be and actually then play it back for somebody. Now, I don't have to engage in that a whole lot, but it's certainly nice to have that technology available to me. Also, maps. Maps of foreign cities, you know, certainly you get on, you do your Google® maps, or whichever map package that you like. And so, you can quickly understand the layout, you can go to the street views, you can see what actually is going to be encountered. And that actually helps out a lot, because you can imagine going to a new place, uh... where the signage is different, the behavior, the way people operate is... it can be a little daunting to get around, so... getting that baseline in place, seeing the maps is actually good—pretty good. And even things like Uber® now, Uber® being across many different countries... a little bit less risky in trying to get from point A to point B or actually... navigating within the places that you're going to be visiting. Now, I can't knock, you know, riding a Tuk-Tuk or a Jeepney—I think those are great experiences; but also you want to make sure that, you know, you... you can get around, and having something like an Uber® platform is... is quite good, too. And, then, without doubt the social media platforms. Your... your Facebooks, your Twitter, your WhatsApps certainly allows us to communicate, allows us to keep people updated—not only... with the folks we deal with over there but also back home. You know, so if I am... I'm away, my family knows that I'll be safe. If they see me commenting on a Facebook post... it may seem trivial but it actually has a big impact. And some of the regions that I go to aren't what I'd call the... the most stable in the world, as you can imagine... and so... getting that communication is, I think, important—at least for family and for... for business associates. So... so my response would definitely be in the technology aspects of how we can interact and how we can get communication... between my partners overseas.

You said that technology is an equalizer, but is access to, as well as reliability and usage of technology the same everywhere?

No, I can't say it's the same. I think people use technology differently... even with the own... my own software platform that I built; I would use it in one way to find results and I would see other users—my engineers, even my developers—using it in different ways that I hadn't thought of. So... people adapt the technology to their particular

and specific needs. And as I mentioned, I also found that a lot of the international community tended to be very efficient with how they used some of the technologies. They would find components modules... open-source public domain content that they could use and pull together. Not everything had to be a customized solution. They had to try to use what was available to them, bring it together and try to get as much of their problem space addressed using that... that level of activity, whereas historically there may have been a little bit more "We want to sell the complete package here back home that has all the bells and whistles." But, you know, it's just a matter of getting, in that case, who the client might be. So, I would... I would say that would be a... probably a little bit of a discriminator—that they generally tend to be a bit more efficient, because the level of access to some of the resources—the computing power... the cost infrastructures are going to be a little bit different than what we've got back here. And so, they're going to... they're going to make... they're going to maximize what they can do with it.

What main challenges does IPC face today?

What I find, when we were... when... whenever we get involved in a new engagement that's overseas, it's finding a local partner to work with. So, as you can imagine, that... the nature of the platforms that we've delivered are used by virtually every kind of a government operation. So every time a new country comes online, we have to figure out who we're going to work with, because it's unrealistic as a business—you know... as a U.S.-based business—to be able to support onsite activity and development and interactions with... with foreign governments. And so... what we always do is we look for a company, a local company that either has an existing relationship with the... the agency, the government... or the government itself may recommend a company that we could work with... or especially in those where there's a... let's say a tender, an RFP, a request for a proposal coming out, where there may be several companies that are going to be bidding on this and they've done their research and they found that we are a... a potential player for that. You know, that's the way that we start to build and form relationships. And so... finding a local partner is a... not a hurdle but it's a step that we've got to go through in order to be successful. And the better the partner, certainly, the better the deliverables that we

can make to those clients. And... you know, I'm going to say... not every relationship works out... You'll have that in every aspect of life, and so... you know, you want to make good decisions about which partners that you work with and... and you can find. Coming back to a topic we also mentioned, sometimes language... language barriers... but you want to make sure that, you know, you're... you're comparing apples to apples and that you're on the same... understanding of... of what's needed and how things go together. Um, making sure they've got the right infrastructure in place—that they've got the baseline, the computation, the data sources, and... and the technical experience... in order to deliver the platforms. As I mentioned before, these tend to be more complex systems, and you want to make sure you've got the right resources available to do that... and, you know, and then from there you... you cross different hurdles as you go further and further down the... down the relationship.

Um... there are different ways to do business, as well... Certain things that we—I don't want to say take for granted back here, but, you know, if I sell a software license to a client, they purchased the license and the... the sale is done. I've seen a lot of times in overseas there is a user acceptance test that they want to go through, where they've got to get approvals from the end users that it meets all the requirements and conditions that they want. And, you know, this could sometimes—especially if it's part of an integrated platform—could be several months to potentially even up to a year. And so... knowing that going in—you know, that, “Hey, yeah, we'll get through a user acceptance test, but, um, you know, the payment for licenses could be a number of months down the road.” Um... part of that becomes part of the negotiation and how we interact with, in this case, the various clients or any risks that we want to take with the partners that we've got there. So... again, all that stuff is something that we've got to factor in... We've also got to talk to them about VAT, right, value-added tax... you know, you can imagine that when a government wants to take 15%, or 20%... \of the costs of an operation as part of VAT, that can affect the bottom line. And you need to know that going in... before you bid a platform... because if you wind up at... with a 20%... VAT on something, it can definitely make a... an engagement not profitable if it comes down to that. So, um... these are things you kind of learn through experience, and you start to ask the questions, you do some

research, you... you figure certain things out, and... you work the contingencies into the relationships with the partners and with the clients.

What challenges and rewards can people expect from working in IPC?

By far, incredible experiences. I've had some of the best experiences of my life working overseas with some of my partners and... and some of the clients that I've dealt with. You make incredible friendships. Um... you get to see the world. You eat phenomenal, fantastic food. Um... food is very fresh there, that tends not to be as processed overseas as it is back here at home... you know, often in the host country you'll... or with the host partners I deal with, you know, we're not going to go to the touristy spots. We're going to go to more of the local venues, and so you get to really see some of the true colors of what's out there and, you know, get... get the local flavor of what's going on. And so I always looked forward to that, and, you know, didn't mind going to certain countries... because I knew the experiences would be wonderful and phenomenal. And the relationships that I've forged—you know, I... I have relationships all over the world that if I know somebody's going to a country, or if I'm going back to a country, we'll get back together and we'll have... you know, we have relationships and... you know, we'll get together for dinner, we'll get together for an update. So... these things... these are friendships that last a long time. And so that's one of the things that I think is important. So... in my business, sure, we're making the world a safer place, we're... we're getting rid of bad guys, but I'm also forging really good relationships, friendships, and... and affecting... affecting a lot of things in a... in a very good way.

What makes working with other places more gratifying and challenging than working within your own country?

So... with the nature of the work that I've done in the US, we've got some incredible agencies. We've got the FBI—but there's only one FBI. We've got the IRS. We've got all these incredible agencies. And we do some phenomenal work with them. Those experiences are able to convey to a lot of other countries as well. So what we do here, as I've mentioned before, we can also deploy elsewhere. And so I don't view it

that “Hey, we're doing stuff with tax compliant, or border crossing, or customs, or immigration... only for the US.” We can take these approaches and apply them elsewhere. And so, you know, with the 200-plus countries in the world, these are systems that can go into a large number of different places... and truly have an impact on the bottom line, on the activities, on the... the welfare, the... the operations... of the country, of the governments. And I think that's important, that we can actually see ourselves making a difference. And it isn't just for one place, it can be essentially "Xeroxed". It can be reproduced in a lot of different places and therefore have a bigger impact than just for one specific agency. And I think that's the really important part—that it's... because, you know, the nature of doing government operations, you know—because there is only one FBI—the nature... what they do... their business processes... how they approach things, it's... it's only ever done there. And, you know, you want to maximize that exposure in and around the world, and... and that's why working internationally, I think, is... is very rewarding.

How has technology affected practice, research, and teaching of IPC in your region of the world or elsewhere?

I already have answered some of this. I'll bring it back to communications being simplified... that, you know, through all of the online activities—text, emails, everything that goes along with that—we can convey meaning and content pretty effectively. Share whiteboards, share screens, show exactly what we want to have done. And that... that facilitates things and is in—pretty much—near real time. And I would also say the same goes when I'm abroad. You can imagine, you get a little bit homesick, your family's back here, and... I want to communicate back home. I want to see everybody's faces; I want to know what happened during the day. And, you know, it... it goes both ways.

But I'll also say... because of our background, or... or the basis of what we were doing—it's on software development. And there are great code segments, modules, and systems that have been developed by other people... obviously in other countries where they've created components and... and modules that we'll want to use in our own deployments. And so... learning about those... offerings... learning about what's available out there beyond just our local focus I think is very important

as well. And, you know, you kind of realize that on certain things. Some of the Web pages that I use for my corporate stuff. I use modules that were built out of Vietnam. And the modules cost 5 bucks [US \$5.00], right? It's great for the folks out of there; they make a little bit of money, especially on scale if... if lots of places buy it for the Web pages. But... if I had to implement the same thing myself, it would certainly cost a whole lot more than... than 5 dollars to implement. And so... scale of economy, creativity, you know... some level of best platforms that are out there, you know, weren't developed in the US. They were developed overseas and then actually brought or operationalized or scaled based on... on U.S. activity, but some of the initial foundations were over... were based on overseas act... development and activities.

How well has higher education prepared students to work in IPC, and what else can higher education do to prepare students for IPC work in industry?

I think that's very important. So... I do a lot of interaction with some universities in the area, and I'm a strong believer of getting students involved in projects. It's not just about test taking—the real world, we don't take tests. We do projects. And figuring out how to solve those projects and making mistakes, and improving on those mistakes, and then delivering an end product is really, you know, what the real world is about. So... figuring out how to create something and improve on something... fix something... is really what I would focus on getting students involved with. And a lot of that is... communication is key... and that's something I... I say to everybody I talk—communication is key. And public speaking is critical, too. So... you want to be able to communicate to other people. You don't want to be shy. You don't want to be somebody in the back row that never talks. You want to convey your thoughts. You want to convey your ideas. And you do that by interacting, communicating with other folks. So... I... I look back on my career, and I remember in my early... in the early part of my career where I had never really gotten up in front of anybody—especially at a conference, right, where you've got to present a paper and there's, you know, 200 people out there. And... that can be pretty nerve-racking. And if you've never done it before, it... it definitely is nerve-racking. And so, I think... I think that students need

to almost be mandated to do more public speaking, to be exposed to those things and be put into those situations because they... in the real world, they will—especially the more successful they become, the better they're going to communicate.

Um, also, I would say... working together in distributed teams. Nothing I do today is solely based on what I do. It's... it's a combination of a lot of different people and their contributions. And so knowing how to operate, where you've got to go to get the different pieces to put it together, who to ask, how to tie it all together—again, working in a... in a distributed way, I think, is very important. And, if you work in a distributed way, whether the person's in the office next to you or across the ocean, honestly it really doesn't matter—it's distributed. And so, you know, there may be some time differences and maybe a few cultural differences, but if you're used to working that way—and I think actually more and more—kind of the new generations—that's becoming... a little bit more familiar for them to do that. But I think actually to be... to make that part of the curriculum and to force them to do a project. You know, and you may have one or two of your own classmates, but then with... a... a contributing university overseas you're dealing with, maybe one or two of their folks and a third or fourth university or college—the exact same thing. And all of you together create the product or the outcome that you're going to be working on.

Um... and I'd... I'd also say that getting exposed to a foreign language is going to be important, too. Again, not everything is English, and English isn't the end all be all, but I think taking time and learning other languages... you may not necessarily have to be fluent in them... but be exposed to the constructs, be exposed to some of the basic fundamentals of how language works, is going to be key. And I think, you know, kind of mandating... yeh... a semester or two of a... of the foreign language would... would probably be good—maybe even a semester abroad... where we do a little bit more immersion. I don't think that would be a bad requirement to have as well. So... I would like just... really, the emphasis is on communication. Get them exposed to more of that in any way shape or form that can be done... and kind of really expand the boundaries there.

How has industry helped higher education prepare students for IPC work, and what else can industry do to help higher education prepare graduates for IPC work in industry?

I guess the way I can answer that is, you know, when I was doing a lot of the international work, my staff would be key for how we supported our international clients. So it wasn't just there was a single touch point for interacting with the international community. I wanted to make sure that—whether there was new program requirements... supporting internationalization of an interface... the layout of how the menus rolled, whether there were certain standards that had to be put in place—conversions, you know, standard defaults you know, I'd want to get my developers involved in that so they could be exposed to those aspects; so they aren't just thinking about how they're building something in one specific way. You know... my finance guys, Building and Invoicing. Again, coming back to the VAT—we talked about tax credits. So, if we do have to pay a VAT, how do we do a tax credit?... and a lot of other factors of international finance, especially with wire remittance and getting all of that through and set up. It definitely adds a layer of complexity, or... real layer... a layer to our activities. Customer support, you know. As I mentioned we would be up at 10 o'clock. It wasn't just me, my... actually... the customer support teams would be online. They would be there to help answer questions... with interactions, get responses back, so we didn't have to wait 24 hours to get something. And so... how we behaved as a business really was international, and preparing students to know that... to understand that you're not coming in at 9 and you're not leaving at 5. You're kind of—at least in my world we were living and breathing the... the work products, not to the point where, you know, your... your personal lives were... disrupted, but you knew you had to accommodate it. And if you could get online for 10 minutes, you know, before you went to bed... answer a few questions and make a whole team of people overseas productive... that's what we did. And that was... that was kind of expected. And so, I think the earlier we can get people exposed to that—and again, coming back to preparing how graduates will come, you know, having them work in that kind of a situation, environment would be... would be wonderful.

And then... also, everybody thinks travel is very... huh-huh... glamorous... and you can imagine that, "Yeah! Hey, we're going to go over to a foreign country, we're going to do onsite visits, and we're going to all this kind of stuff." And it is fun! A lot of times, it's fun. But you also can imagine that, you know, there are time differences and there is jet lag, and—you know—you're there to work. You're not there to necessarily do a whole lot of sightseeing, and, you know, when the client picks you up at 8 o'clock in the morning and you don't get back to your hotel room until 10 o'clock at night sometimes—that's... that's what goes into these things. And so... understanding that, you know, you're still working, still trying to solve problems, and... you're not going to be sitting on, you know—huh-huh—a boat in the Caribbean, drinking cocktails... while that goes on. So... the... the... real... you kind of have to teach them what the reality is. Um... you can have fun and you can have an enjoyable time but, when you're dealing with international business, it's serious. You're there to work. You can have great experiences but, you know, business comes first. And... I think you get that over a bit of time and sometimes it can be... a little bit of a... I don't want to say a rude awakening but, you know, after you've traveled 14 hours, 18 hours to get to a location and... and then you put in a... a 12-hour day... that—huh-huh-huh—that can definitely get someone's attention of being a long day.

One more question. What is your educational background?

So... my background... I went to a private university down South. And I was in Computer Science. I went to the computer science and engineering school at the university. And... this university was better known for their medical school, their law school, their business school. And the nice thing about this was... so I was... I was definitely a computer nerd. I programmed, I, you know, was up to 2 in the morning drinking Jolt® cola... that kind of level of activity. And because the computer science department was small—or smaller in this university—if you showed initiative, you got to do so much more. It wasn't that you were just taking the classes and doing the curriculum. I got involved in research projects. I got to be able to use equipment that most people would never dream of getting their hands on. I was included in a lot of things because I showed that initiative. And I wasn't just going through... the classes

or... just wasn't going through the curriculum. So it allowed me to do a lot more than a lot of my colleagues in various other universities. So I got a really good education. I got, actually, a lot of real-world experience even before I got into the real world. And that helped, kind of really prod me forward into what became the career I took. ■