



PROFESSIONAL SERVICES TECH NOTE #058

Emergency Preparedness Procedures

The Concept

As a storage administrator, you make sure the company's data is safely replicated and backed up to external storage in the event of a disaster. But what if the disaster is you? What if you get sick or take a long vacation and an emergency comes up? Can someone else on your team cover for you until you return? If you have ever taken time off and received a panicked phone call from the office and thought, 'Why can't anyone else figure out how to solve these issues?' the answer is No. The problem may not be with your co-workers' abilities, but failure to prepare for these emergencies by adequately documenting your job and cross training.

Examples

1. Cross train with co-workers. Dedicate time each week to teaching or learning from a co-worker.
2. Use an encrypted password manager to store passwords. Install a password manager (or many to segregate groups of passwords) on a secure system connected to UPS or emergency power. Keep it updated.
3. Write Desktop Procedures for each employee or group. This is the heart of your emergency preparedness. A basic desktop procedure should be in both hardcopy and online formats and include the following:
 - Daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly timeline of tasks to perform
 - Definitions of special terminology and acronyms
 - Task metadata (who wrote the procedure and the revision number and date)
 - Task overview (when it's performed, why it's performed, and who is impacted by the outcome)
 - Step-by-step procedures to perform the task (explain the Why and How of complicated steps. Follow the document writing guidance of Tech Note 012 - <http://communities.netapp.com/docs/DOC-5022>)
 - Validation steps (expected results and time estimates)
 - Recovery and escalation steps (what to do if the task fails and who to call)
 - Internal and external contact list and workflow (prioritized list of who inside the company and at vendors to call for help)
4. Test, test, and retest. Don't wait until a disaster to find out your documentation is incomplete or incomprehensible. Test with a co-worker and then retest with someone outside the IT department.

What It Means To You

Documenting all the critical tasks you perform someone may need to know in an emergency can be daunting. Copy from or reference other documents as much as possible to reduce re-writing, copy command line output, and use screenshots. Start by documenting the tasks that are either (1) very complicated or (2) you explain all the time. Then identify tasks that have the biggest negative impact if they are not completed or they fail. Think of your desktop procedures as a First Aid guide to keep the patient alive until a doctor arrives.

You might think your value to a company is diminished if more people know what you do. This thinking is not only bad for your employer, but bad for you as well. You are a knowledge worker and your value comes from your ability to learn new things and to solve problems. If you are the only person who knows how to manage CrunchCalc then you limit your ability to grow in your position. When the business replaces the CrunchCalc

application, you may find you are no longer needed. Which of these resume histories looks interesting to a prospective employer?

1. During my seven years at Acme Corp., I was the only one who knew how to manage the CrunchCalc application and servers.
2. During my seven years at Acme Corp., I solved problems A, B and C saving thousands of man-hours and dollars. I also learned new technologies X, Y and Z, then wrote documentation and cross-trained my co-workers.

Continue pushing yourself to be the Subject Matter Expert on a technology, but share what you learn so you and your co-workers can turn off the phone and enjoy your time off.

More Information

How to Write Comprehensive Audit-Compliant Desktop Procedures:

http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/2332164/how_to_write_comprehensive_auditcompliant.html?cat=15

How to Write a Standard Operating Procedure for Front Desk Staff:

http://www.ehow.com/how_5514832_write-procedure-front-desk-staff.html

The Practice of System and Network Administration 2nd Edition, Addison-Wesley

http://www.amazon.com/Practice-System-Network-Administration-Second/dp/0321492668/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1271687251&sr=1-1

Life insurance for passwords and sensitive documents

<http://news.cnet.com/life-insurance-for-your-passwords-legacy-locker/>

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Send comments, corrections & suggestion to Michael Cope at mcope@netapp.com

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