

About SCN: Stephen Millard



[1]

Happy New Year everyone! I want to start 2013 on a positive and uplifting note: Let's think about all the potential that a community like SCN has, and how amazing people such as this month's Member of the Month Stephen Millard contribute and spark conversations within the community.

Stephen works for a consulting company in the UK that provides services for a product that SAP resells, called "SAP Talent Visualization by Nakisa". With a "z", Stephen – wink wink ;-). But beyond his most recent domain of expertise (he admitted to starting with SAP just 16 months ago!), Stephen has year-long experience in many things technical and business such as development, support, and coaching. He is an excellent writer who posts deep thoughts on SCN and contributes with technical content in his personal blog [2]; he knows how to engage the community and teases them, just to check that they are still reading.

You should read Stephen's excellent blog series on Contributing on SCN, with How Much Should I Contribute on SCN [3] being my favorite. I will never forget the lesson about the 5% and how well it was presented in this blog.

Stephen and I skyped early January to get to know each other and exchange thoughts on contributing, he was kind enough to take a break in his usual work day and share details about his life, work and passion. All with a British spelling that I left for the sake of authenticity ;-)

Read on! Because you will get answers to the list of true/false questions he shared in his Blog It Forward post [4]!!

Stephen, can you tell us a bit about yourself, where you live, who you work for, and other things you would like to share with the community (hobbies, fun facts)?

I'm very fortunate to live in the beautiful city of York in the UK [5]. I studied at one of the universities in the city and like so many of the students loved the city so much that I didn't leave.

Just over a year ago I joined a company called ROC [6] (an SAP partner specializing in HCM) as a consultant for Visualization Solutions by Nakisa. I have an IT background but have never worked hands-on with SAP products before so it has been a difficult but rewarding change in direction career-wise.

Outside of work I keep myself busy with family life (my wife and I have a two-year old son), running a few web sites and teaching the Japanese martial art of Jiu Jitsu [7].

Your profile bio explains that you do (did?) executive coaching, can you share a bit more about this experience, what you learned and what surprised you most, working with executives?

In my previous role I headed up a small IT department in an organisation whose remit is to improve Higher Education in the UK. During my time in this role I extended my previous business and sports coaching experience by completing some accredited courses on executive coaching along with some of the directors, senior advisers and other departmental heads in the organisation. The aim was to give the various management teams more experience and skill in developing and managing the organisation's staff.

Each of the coaches in the organisation was available to provide coaching to any member of staff (not just executive staff) on any area where the coachee felt they could benefit from coaching. This included not only coaching staff in improving areas where they were weak, but also coaching them on areas where they were strong and areas they would like to develop into.

As opposed to mentoring, the coaching approach to supporting people was surprisingly effective as it enabled me to help people to very much help themselves without me requiring any significant expertise in the area they were being coached on.

It is a hugely rewarding experience to coach people and is well worth the time and effort. It gave me a better insight into other aspects of management and even areas such as negotiation and training.

I think the experience in coaching set me up really well for my current role. Coaching, like consultancy is all about asking the right questions and it gave me a real hands-on feel for helping develop talent within a number of areas in an organisation.

In your Blog It Forward post, you mention that you "have worked with many wonderful and not so wonderful systems". Can you share the bad and ugly of the "not so wonderful systems" you had to work with in the past?

Well I started my IT career working on a Year 2000 programme migrating mainframe hosted financial systems onto newer mainframe hosted financial systems that involved working in Assembler, Cobol, JCL and when I was lucky a bit of REXX. The newer systems were fine, but some of the old stuff had been around so long and had been "Frankensteined" over the years to do so many things for which it wasn't originally intended that there were quite a few headaches.

The worst system however I think would probably be a system I had occasion to use in my last role. It was the management console for our office telephone system. I'll spare the manufacturer the shame of naming them, but the system had two interfaces – one web based and one command line. Neither had any been provided with any documentation. Some of the features and settings were named merely as numbers and hidden over twenty levels deep in a settings hierarchy. The software phone didn't work and the new phones the company produced were not backwards compatible with the system meaning that every time a phone failed we permanently lost a phone from the system. Everyone hated it, but due to significant budget restrictions we had to live with it for my entire time in post.

Now I'd like to break the suspense and try to answer all the questions the community has about you. In your Blog It Forward post ^[8] you made certain statements and told the community to figure out which ones were true. Now that you're the SCN Member of the Month January 2013 you owe it to us to let us know which ones are true!

Islander?: I grew up on an island shaped like a banana.

This one is true. I grew up on an island called Walney ^[9] off the coast of Cumbria in the UK.

Sees the World Differently?: I once took part in a scientific experiment about visual perception where from a sizeable sample of subjects I was the

only subject to be categorised to a particular quadrant.

This one is also true. I had a friend who was carrying out some perception based tests as part of his PhD and I believe I got my own little paragraph in his thesis as I was better at recognising faces I'd seen before if I saw them from an entirely different angle in different lighting conditions than from any other scenario.

Romantic?: I proposed to my wife in probably the world's largest grave yard.

Another truth in this one. I proposed to my wife on the Giza plateau in front of the Sphinx just outside of Cairo in Egypt.

Tea Total?: I don't drink alcohol but I do drink lots of tea.

Again this one's true. I do drink a lot of tea and I don't drink alcohol.

[Note from Laure: As a good British, Stephen drinks his tea (Assam) with milk]

Potty?: I have a signed first edition of every Harry Potter book.

Finally we reach a lie. I don't own any Harry Potter books, let alone signed first editions.

Chiroptophobic?: I suffer from an irrational fear of bats.

Another lie with this one. I actually like bats and often used to sit watching them fly in the late summer evenings around my university campus and the bridges in the city.

Coach?: I hold a qualification in executive (business) coaching.

I think we already know this one's true. I have a CPD certificate in business and executive coaching from the University of Strathclyde (Glasgow).

Scarred?: I have two scars. One from playing football and one from a gun fight.

I do have quite a few scars. I have one on my knee from falling over onto some sharp stones whilst playing football when I was six and I have a scar on one shoulder where I slammed into a sharp piece of scenery during a laser tag game when I was in my late teens. So technically this one is true.

[Note from Laure: I'd say Stephen got us big time, didn't he?]

Surprising?: I once surprised a 'colleague' whilst visiting another city when, as he loudly verbally berated me to his colleagues for not answering my phone, I walked up behind him and whispered "that's because I'm behind you".

One of the most amazing coincidences and funniest things I've ever had happen to me – absolutely true.

Charitable?: Whilst at university I won a charitable physics challenge and had dinner with Professor Stephen Hawking.

This last one is unfortunately not true. Whilst I did study physics as half of my undergraduate degree at university I have not had the opportunity to meet Professor Hawking^[10].

When did you become a member of SCN and what brought you to this community?

I first came across SCN when I was preparing for my interview with ROC. I found it an invaluable resource for preparing a presentation I had to give for the second stage of the interview process.

I signed up in September 2010 when I joined ROC, but saw that a new system was being introduced, so I was very much a lurker until the new system came along when I started taking a much more active role in the community.

How does SCN help you in your daily activities?

As someone who is still relatively new to SAP, SCN is somewhere I naturally end up for answers. A lot of the questions I have on a daily basis have been answered or at least discussed before and so each day SCN helps me grow that little bit further.

I also from time to time pitch in at answering other people's questions. I'm no expert yet but when I have something valuable to add that no one else has at that point I'll pitch in. As my experience increases I hope I'll be able to add even more back into the community.

How do you find the time to contribute to SCN? Recently you have not been as active as before, we would like to see you blog more. You have a very distinctive way of blogging, you put a lot of thoughts into your posts, use compelling images and we can feel that you want to nurture your fellow members (motivate them to contribute, share, and teach something). We need people like you active in 2013. Do we have a deal?

Finding the time can be difficult. Like everyone else I have quite a few demands on my time. These past few months I've been travelling a lot more (on cramped trains where I couldn't get any blogging done) and had my hand in a few things outside of work that took up quite a bit of my time. I am committed to making some time to do more blogging and I hope many others in the community do too.

Personally I spend a while researching and drafting out my posts. I try and cover as many angles as I can and try to purposefully put in some hooks to engage others in conversation about the post. I do have a list of blog post ideas and even some partially written posts so you can expect some new stuff from me in the not too distant future. I'm also hoping to find the time to add some more information to the VSN wiki on SCN as I think I've got some stuff that is more suited to being a wiki page than a blog post.

Do we have a deal? Absolutely!

What do you like most about the community in general?

The SCN community is really open and helpful. There's always someone around that can help and they always do. I like that it isn't just one person who pitches into the discussion but that it really is a range of people with different experiences. It's the sort of place I found easy to fit into.

Note from Laure: There is a quote from one of Stephen's blogs that I really like and share with you here: "If you don't contribute then the network is at least partially closed to you."

What technology recently made you most enthusiastic about?

Well 2012 was an amazing year. With the advances made for the discovery of the Higgs boson ^[1], the release of the Raspberry Pi ^[2] and Google's self driving cars ^[3] there's been a lot to be enthusiastic about technology-wise.

[Note from Laure: Lucky me there's always Wikipedia when in doubt!]

If I have to narrow it down then I think the news around Google glasses ^[4] is the one that I'm most interested in. Whilst I don't think the first release will be ground breaking I think it will open the door to new ways in which to interact with and consume information about our environment. I think it will be so much more than a fancy head up display on some geeky glasses.

Of course I can't fully answer this question without giving a nod to the new 4.0 release of SAP Visualization Solutions by Nakisa ^[15] [See this SCN blog ^[16] by Luke Marson]. The new suite was released towards the end of last year and offers up some great new functionality; in particular writing back of data to SAP for org modeling and mobile to org data on the go via the new OrgMobile application. I'm really looking forward to 2013 and working with the new suite and in particular the newly revamped Admin Console for configuring the applications.

If a new member came to you and asked for your advice on how to be an active and respected member of SCN, what would you say?

I think first of all you have to work out what interests you. It's always easier to devote your time to the things which are interesting. Find the resources already on SCN for the area(s) you're interested in and work out what you can add to take it on or in a new direction.

I think we've all sat in meetings where people spout useless waffle or the conversation's going around in circles and then someone will throw in a nugget of information or an idea that brings gets things moving in a positive way again. The key whether in a meeting or on SCN is to add a little bit more value. Do that and you'll soon earn some respect.

In terms of being active there are quite a number of ways in which I think you can be active. I guess I'd refer the new member to my blog post "How can I contribute to SCN?" ^[17]; part two of my five part "SCN Contribution" series. It covers the different ways in which to contribute and some ideas for the sorts of things you could contribute for each.

Is there an SCN member you admire (OK... you can name a few)?

I admire an awful lot of SCN members for their contributions and support of other community members so I'm definitely going to need to name a few. I follow a lot of SCN members on Twitter (I use it as my centralised news stream) but I guess my work interests heavily guide this so there's most definitely an HCM and Nakisa bias.

When push comes to shove I think the ones I admire most are:

1. Jarret Pazahanick ^[18] commentates and blogs about more HCM stuff than I believe is humanly possible. I'm convinced he isn't just one man but rather an army of clones!
2. Stephen Burr ^[19] and Luke Marson ^[20] are the most prolific contributors in the VSN space and I learn a lot from their blog posts and interactions on the discussions area.
3. I also get a lot of good tips and insights into SCN by following Jason Lax ^[21] and Oliver Kohl ^[22]. They seem to work really hard to keep everyone abreast of changes and ideas on SCN.

Easy question: Mac or Windows?

That is so not an easy question! I have a Mac and a PC on my desk right now.

I really am the kind of guy who just likes to use the right tool for the right job. You can give me pretty much any operating system (OS X/ WinX / *nix /zOS /etc.) and some hardware to run it. As long as I can get the work done efficiently on it I'll be quite happy to use whatever.

So if I really have to choose a preference for Mac or Windows I would have to say from a SAP consultant stand point I think I'd lean towards Windows. For the cost I think you can usually get more powerful hardware and access to a wider range of applications to meet almost any business need.

Of course with things like Boot Camp, Hackintoshes, Virtualisation (VMWare,

Parallels, VirtualBox, etc.) and cloud hosted systems you can probably bend the rules every which way you need to in order to get the best of both worlds.

Are you on Twitter?

I certainly am. I actually have four Twitter accounts ... but if people would like to follow me at work then I'm @SAP_Stephen [23].

1. <http://scn.sap.com/servlet/JiveServlet/showImage/38-77893-171364/Stephen+Millard.jpg>
2. <http://www.thoughtasylum.com/>
3. <http://scn.sap.com/community/about/blog/2012/06/27/scn-contribution--how-much-should-i-contribute-to-scn>
4. <http://scn.sap.com/community/about/blog/2012/09/05/blog-it-forward--stephen-millard>
5. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/York>
6. <http://roc-group.com/>
7. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jujutsu>
8. <http://scn.sap.com/community/about/blog/2012/09/05/blog-it-forward--stephen-millard>
9. <http://maps.google.com/maps?q=Walney,+United+Kingdom&hl=en&ll=53.566414,-3.636475&spn=3.791122,9.876709&sll=37.269174,-119.306607&sspn=10.152982,19.753418&oq=Walney+&hnear=Walney>
10. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stephen_Hawking
11. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Higgs_boson
12. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Raspberry_Pi
13. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Google_self-driving_car
14. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Google_Glass
15. <http://www.nakisa.com/solutions/solutions-overviews/talent-management.htm>
16. <http://scn.sap.com/community/erp/hcm/talent-visualization-by-nakisa/blog/2012/11/19/visualization-solutions-by-nakisa-40-is-now-available>
17. <http://scn.sap.com/community/about/blog/2012/06/26/scn-contribution--how-can-i-contribute-to-scn>
18. <http://scn.sap.com/people/jarret.pazahanick>
19. <http://scn.sap.com/people/stephen.burr>
20. <http://scn.sap.com/people/luke.marson>
21. <http://scn.sap.com/people/jason.lax>
22. <http://scn.sap.com/people/oliver>
23. http://www.twitter.com/SAP_Stephen