

# My Time in Hell, or Why I Fired a Client

George F. Hayhoe  
George Hayhoe Associates



# The Project in a Nutshell

- **Goal:** Implementation of SAP's R3 product
- **Timeline:** 20 weeks to rollout
- **My Task:** Develop a style guide and help plan for customization of online help

# Background

- International client with new subsidiaries wanted to standardize business systems.
- R3 would allow them to consolidate
  - ◆ human resources
  - ◆ payroll
  - ◆ accounts payable and receivable
  - ◆ inventory management and delivery
  - ◆ maintenance tracking and scheduling

# The Interview

- The company seemed to be doing the right things the right way the first time.
- The project manager impressed me as savvy about the need for documentation and training.
- They wouldn't take no for an answer.

# What They Were Doing Right

- They recognized the value that user training and documentation could contribute.
- They were reengineering their business to make it more effective and to adapt it to the software rather than reengineering the software to fit their business practices.

# Difficulties with the Style Guide

- Some team members wanted the guide to be extremely prescriptive of format and content
- Others insisted that it offer only minimal guidelines.
- A compromise was unacceptable to either side.

## . . . with the Online Help

- I provided a list of items needed to customize hundreds of megabytes of compiled help files:
  - ◆ a detailed schematic of the help system
  - ◆ copies of all the source files
- They never requested the materials, so there was no way they could customize the help by the pilot project's implementation date.

## . . . and with the Manager

- The manager was inexperienced at managing a major project.
- She was not able to deal with the strong personalities on the team and forge consensus.

# What I Did

- After 10 weeks, I decided to stop butting my head against these two walls.
- I explained (diplomatically) why I wanted to withdraw; helped recruit, interview, and hire my replacement; and said goodbye.

# Lessons Learned

- On future projects, I want to interview with the entire team to learn their dynamics and attitudes.
- I want to know more about the experience of the manager with whom I will be working.