

Kai's Story

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I met Kai in the Nuremburg in the summer of 2004. Here is his experience with social networking told in his own words. He said he is quite happy for anyone to contact him if he can be of help.

Until 2002, my career as an IT consultant was a quite successful one. I started to make my living as a freelancer in 1980 and managed to have clients for 22 years with only a 6-month-break because I could not work thanks to a serious back problem.

During this time I was successful thanks to:

- Strong and permanent demand of IT consulting services
- A very good knowledge of APL. Well, at least since the mid eighties.
- The ability of understanding problems and to find solutions for them
- Sheer luck

I believed then that this would be enough to stay successful in the future as well. That turned out to be wrong.

When my then client decided to sack me, this came as a complete surprise to me. Therefore, I was not prepared to deal with the situation properly. Furthermore, the German economy just started to run into deep problems.

Freelancers are among the first to encounter problems when an economy runs into trouble because they can be sacked too easily. When I started to look for a new client I found that demand was literally zero.

In the following two and a half years I improved my skills: I learned Visual Basic.NET and also XHTML, XML and CSS. I accepted unpaid work simply to exercise my skills and convinced myself that I was still able to do a good job. Still, there was almost zero demand. Two requests in the more than two years came to an abrupt end when I was asked about my age.

Other freelancers had similar problems, even those younger and formally better educated, but that did not help either.

At that time I seriously started to doubt about my future: would I ever be able to work as a freelancer or was I already too old with my 51 years?

Things changed when I met Brooke Allen who encouraged me to consider working outside Germany. At that time I would not have considered this as an opportunity because the lack of language skills. However, my situation was desperate enough to listen to Brooke.

Brooke did send a number of emails to companies potentially interested in hiring an APL specialist, and he also invited me to an event in London where I met Morten Kromberg, Stephen Taylor and Paul Grosvenor who would become very important people in my life soon.

Thanks to Morten I joined SimCorp, the most impressive company I ever worked for. I shared an apartment in Copenhagen with 4 other APL Consultants. This way I was able to improve my language skills.

Thanks to Stephen Taylor and Paul Grosvenor I got the opportunity to move to UK in September 2005. Since then I am working for the largest British Pension Company.

Why was this possible? Because Brooke, Morten, Stephen and Paul helped me unselfishly. That is what social networking is all about.

Since then I am much more open-minded myself. I am listening to what people have to tell me. Whenever I can help or give advice I do so, not because I am looking for an immediate return but because I believe that everything pays back one day.

For that reason I have also started to contribute to the community which has enabled me to make my living for such a long time. Apart from writing articles for Vector and writing software freely available for download I am also the guy behind the APL wiki.

I am also working on a project with the code name "APL on Wings" which will hopefully become the APL equivalent of Ruby on Rails: an object-oriented framework for developing Web applications according to the agile paradigm.

How did I meet Brooke in the first place? A former colleague working for my last client called me and told me that an American guy interested in APL would visit the company. He asked me whether I would like to meet him. "No, I don't" I told him because I thought I should not waste time to meet somebody I had never heard about before. Instead I could improve my skills, I thought. I had not learned my lesson then.

Only because the American guy was told that I had written some interesting things in APL he decided that he should meet me. So my former colleague called me again. "You might not be interested in seeing him" he told me, "but he wants to see you!" As it turned out, that second phone call changed my life.