

What is a "Mentoring" Company

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Anyone who has worked as a web developer knows how difficult it is to describe what you do to a novice. My wife, who actually handles benefits and management tasks for CF Webtools, still can't really come up with an adequate description. It's not enough to say that we "build web sites". That is certainly true, but it lumps us in with pure design shops and marketing companies. We are certainly not a marketing company, and although design is part of what we do, it is only the tip of the iceberg. I sometimes say that we are a "software company" that specializes in "web based" or "browser based" applications. That kind of sums up what we *do* but it doesn't say much about the kind of company we *are*.

I like to describe **CF Webtools** as a "mentoring company". By that I mean that we focus on mentoring our developers to enhance their growth and potential. Of late I have begin to try and qualify this statement and boil it down to some principles that thrive in our workplace. Please note - I am quite serious about the thoughts I am sharing here, but this post could be concieved of as a commercial of sorts - so read on at your peril. Here's what I have come up with so far.

Toward Our Developers

- **The Web Developer Garden** - Our focus toward our developers is on professional growth. We strive to challenge them technically and intellectually. We hire folks with high aptitude and surround them with more experience developers. We see ourselves as a garden taking web developer seedlings and watering and feeding them so they grow into strong developer trees. Ok, that's a sappy analogy - but in many ways it fits. Here are some of the ways we translate that into action:
 - **30 to 35 billable hours** - That is what we need from our developers to make a profit. The rest of that time is spent honing their skills (5 to 10 hours a week).
 - **Conferences** - We send our developers to one conference a year (after they have been with us for 6 months).
 - **Wide Exposure** - We have such a wide array of customers and legacy code that our developers have seen dozens of different approaches to solving common problems. We have applications on every version of CF back to 5.0. We have model glue applications, Farcry, Fusebox, and our own coding framework. We have projects requiring the use of .NET assemblies, migrations from classic ASP, and projects requiring Java programming. In short, the amount of experience you get working for a company like CF Webtools provides for booming growth if you have the aptitude.
 - **Collegial Approach** - We try to *value* our developers. We want them to feel like they are colleagues on a staff of experts. In our current work place our developers can be seen moving back and forth between offices as they help each other through difficult problems. We have a *knowledge sharing* approach to all of our projects. We abhor the *knowledge hoarding* mentality.
 - **Whole Person Support** - We emphasize the things that make people whole. We are not looking for 80 hour a week developers who have no interests beside technology. We like to see attention to education, family, faith, leisure... all the things that make a life worth living. We try to make room

for those things. As a workplace we can't directly influence every area of life - but we can create an environment where such things are valued and appreciated.

- **Focus on the Community** - We don't just strive to help our own developers. We are interested in the growth of others as well. As good citizens of the community we run the **Nebraska Coldfusion User's Group**. Our developers are regular participants in on-line list serves and forums, answering (and sometimes asking) questions. 5 of us write blogs that are widely read. We want to enhance the overall community in our area - not just feed and water our own garden.

Toward Our Customers

Being a *mentoring company* means that you are going to get a high level of expertise. I often tell customers they are hiring the *aggregate brain* of CF Webtools. A typical customer comes to us with a sticky problem or complex idea. We find ways to solve the problem or implement the idea. Many of our customers have come from having 1 or 2 Coldfusion developers on contract or on staff. A single developer (even yours truly), no matter how competent and knowledgeable, cannot compete with a staff of developers with an eclectic mix of experience and knowledge. CF Webtools brings to the table, knowledge in:

- **All things Coldfusion** - We have projects in CF 5, 6, 7 and 8. We have clusters, integrated third party applications, and used various frameworks. It is highly unlikely that you would be able to present us with a Coldfusion project that is beyond us.
- **Database Expertise** - We have experience in MS SQL 7, 2000 and 2005. We have experience in MySQL 4 and 5. We have experience in Oracle 9 and 10. We have experience with Sybase, Interbase, Foxpro and even Access. We have worked with JMS, MQSeries, AS/400 technologies and the HP e3000.
- **Business Process** - Over the years we have created dozens of applications that mirror business processes in manufacturing, finance, commerce, and service industries.
- **Financial Industry Expertise** - 3 of our advanced developers (including myself) come from the financial industry where we worked on applications handling high volume transactions and data feeds. CF Webtools handles 5 sites (to date) with such needs, and we have done extensive work for Lincoln Financial, DTN and companies in the commodity industries.
- **Hosting and Infrastructure** - Our data center currently hosts 23 servers and growing. We host over 120 web sites and applications.
- **Vision Casting** - It may not seem like it belongs on this list, but one of the things that we do for some of our customers is actually *help them figure out what they want*. When a customer has an idea he or she may or may not know how to get it done. CF Webtools bring enough experience to the table to help you determine what's possible, what is cost effective and what is beyond your reach.

As the owner of CF Webtools I have always thought that a company focused narrowly on profits is not the greatest place to work. Instead, we strive to focus on *growth* in many areas. Revenue is one of those areas, but so is management, team work, and especially expertise. This allows us to give great service, create fabulous applications, and work among a team of (mostly) happy developers.