

## Butler Bob brings a SONA to work

### ***Butler Bob explains to Sam why the right kind of network is critical for the implementation of the automation they are planning. By Gerhard Greeff – Divisional Manager at Bytes Systems Integration***

Sidekick Sam is having a break from fighting the production gremlins and the machine-blocking monsters. He sits back in his chair and almost falls over backward as he notices Butler Bob standing right in front of his table.

Bob with his quiet and unobtrusive ways often surprise people by seemingly appearing out of thin air right in front of them. This serves him well in his function to ensure that nothing and nobody ruins the smooth running of the administration and financial offices. “Goodness Bob,” he exclaims, “how many times do I have to tell you not to sneak up on me! You’ll give me a heart-attach yet. I bet you get a great kick out of seeing people falling out of their chairs. What are you doing here anyway; you *never* come into the plant.”

Bob looks unfazed by his tirade. “I have come to discuss certain issues with you. Under the direction of Peter I might add. We were instructed to work on a plan for automation, or have you forgotten?” Sam is irritated immediately. Bob’s superior manner does nothing to endear him to Sam at the best of times, and his recent near-fall experience just aggravated his dislike. “No, I haven’t forgotten. I have been working on it for the past week I’ll have you know! I suppose you have just remembered it and came to see how you can sponge of my ideas.”

Bob *almost* looks hurt (Bob never *looks* anything. His dead-pan face never shows emotion). “Please Sam,” he says, “I am sorry that I gave you a scare. In my defence though, you looked miles away.” Sam feels bad for Bob. It must be a burden going through life without people noticing you. “Sorry for the outburst Bob,” he says, “but I was just taking a well-deserved break. I have fought six quality gremlins and a paper-eating monster already today. I suppose I am just a bit tired.” He gestures to a chair. “Have a seat Bob; you make me nervous standing there like a statue”

As Bob glides into a chair, Sam scratches through the papers on his table, looking for his notes. “To get back to the reason I came here Sam,” says Bob, “I actually have *not* been sitting around doing nothing. I had meetings with different vendors I thought may give us some advice.” Sam looks at him incredulously. “But Bob,” he says, “how can you talk to vendors without knowing what Peter and I discussed? Surely, we first have to decide what we need to do before we can talk to vendors!” Bob nods his head. “You are right Sam, I don’t know what you are planning, but some things need to be in place to assist you whatever you decide to do. A proper network for instance.”

Sam feels surprised at Bob’s insight. A network is not something he thought about at all, but it does make sense to investigate a network architecture given the level of automation he is planning. “So what have

you figured out Bob. What do we need?" Bob lifts an eye-brow. "Well Sam," he says, "do you remember the Cisco Kid?" Sam immediately knows who Bob is talking about. "You mean that young network chap that installed our office network? The one with the cowboy boots, jeans and bright shirts? He used to walk around with a tool-belt slung low on his hips?" "That's the one," responds Bob. "Your talk about service oriented architectures triggered something and I remembered him talking about something similar. I decided to give him a call and he agreed to come and see us." Sam is startled when The Yellow Rose of Texas suddenly sounds in the room. "Talk about the devil, he must be here now," says Bob as he takes out his cell-phone. "Excuse me while I direct him to your office Sam."

A while later a lanky young man appears at the door to Sam's office. "Good afternoon Mr. Butler," he greets Bob and gives Sam a firm handshake. "My name is Cisco Kidimasowitsci. My friends call me Kid." "Goodness gracious," thinks Sam as he sits back down, "no wonder they call him Kid." Cisco slides down in his chair to get comfortable. "I assume Sam is the chap you want me to tell about SONA?" he says and glances at Bob for confirmation. Seeing Bob's nod of affirmation he fixes Sam with a steely stare. "I believe you are planning a SOA implementation? How much do you know about networks?"

Sam is amazed. People frequently feel intimidated in his presence. He is not sure whether it is as result of his association with Captain Packer, or due to his own forceful personality, but the Cisco Kid seems to be impervious to all of that. He may as well have been ordering fries and Coke in a drive-thru for the amount of nervousness he displays. "Actually," Sam answers, "I only know we need one to make our software do what we need it to do. What is SONA? Is that some new sort of ultrasonic network tool?"

"No SAM," says Cisco, trying hard not to laugh. "We get that a lot you know. Especially from people like yourself that only view a network as a necessary evil. SONA is an acronym for Service Oriented Network Architecture. It is almost a pre-requisite for a SOA implementation." Try as he might, Sam is unable to feel the least bit irritated by Cisco's condescending manner. The chap is just so darn likeable. "So tell me about SONA Kid," says Sam. "In simple terms please. I am only an engineer and not a techno-junkie like you."

Cisco slides even deeper in his chair and says, "Well, I have to give the formal definition so you can relate that to what I am going to tell you. The formal definition is "SONA is an open framework for network-based services used by enterprise applications to drive business results". Now imagine a cell-phone network..." Sam tries to connect SONA to cell-phones without success. "What do you mean cell-phones? Are you talking about a wireless network? I don't think we are there yet you know."

Cisco gives him a lazy smile and replies. "No Sam, I just wanted you to think of what is involved in getting such a network to work. You need a lot of towers, some software running on each, a command centre somewhere that monitors traffic and security and then of course the users running around with their phones. Now if you replace the towers and phones with network components and the users with business applications, you should have a good idea what I am talking about."

Bob *almost* looks impressed. "So, the user is the application using the phone. The phones are network components with applications running on them. A user calls for a service from another component (or phone). The network knows where the other phone is and directs the service to the next component (or phone). The command centre makes sure that the communication is secure and monitored, and can

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report on network performance per component. Towers dynamically divert over-load to other towers within range so that the service can continue uninterrupted. In addition, our vehicle tracking and recovery systems use these networks to find vehicles, so I assume SONA helps to identify where components are. Cell-phone networks also know when a component is not available, such as when it is out of range or switched off. Very annoying that is! Does SONA do *all that?*”

Sam looks at Cisco for confirmation, but seeing the lazy nod remains unimpressed. “That’s all good and well, but from what I have read, it is never a good idea to combine plant networks with business networks. Is that what you mean, because it sounds risky to me?”

Cisco suddenly sits up enthusiastically. “Not at all! That is the beauty of SONA. As long as your networks are connected within the same framework, you can still isolate them from one another, but at the same time have the ability to monitor both networks down to component level. This makes trouble-shooting easier, as the network itself will tell you where to look for the problem!”

As Bob escorts Kid from his office, Sam leans back in his chair. “Yet another complexity I did not take into account,” he thinks to himself. “That will teach me to open my big mouth in front of Captain Packer.”

Look out for the next edition of this continuing saga of Captain Packer and trusty sidekick Sam.

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