

Don Lancaster, Open Research Guru

Don Lancaster is a prolific technical hacker, whose publications have been covered by Whole Earth for decades. His Incredible Secret Money Making Machine is a Whole Earth Catalog regular, and still the best book on how to run a small-time technical or craft business. Don was one of the earliest "home computer" hackers. He has written how-to-mess-with-stuff books on chips, laser printers, and scanners. He specializes in hacking—making ordinary things do things their inventors had not thought of. His how-to advice has always been leading edge, technically clever, and as much as possible, free. For years Don has been running one of the most unusual research outfits going. As he uncovers cool hardware, amazing knowledge, or novel techniques, he posts what he finds immediately. Don conducts open research. He has no technical secrets; in fact his life is propelled by the joy of broadcasting technical secrets. (See his Case Against Patents, page 44) The Web amplifies his love for open source research. You can find remarkably geeky tracts on all manner of technical subjects on his dense Web site (check the "What's New" box). Because Don is one of the best sources I know of for locating hard-to-find sources and odd tools, I asked Don to summarize his latest passions.

—KK

I am presently webmaster of my GURU'S LAIR at www.tinaja.com. My goals here are to have an eclectic mix of unique technical content, a complete, fully searchable reprint archive, and an annotated-link gateway to a wide range of unusual web resources. As always, I go on the assumption that if I happen to find something interesting or exciting or unique, then others might do so as well.

A few of my Guru's Lair library pages now include:

Sewing Awl



One of the world's oldest tools, but one that is often overlooked. This is a heavy-duty needle with its eye at the working end, mounted in a handle. For mending leather, shoes, bags, sewing canvas, or stitching heavy materials, there's no better tool. I don't use mine often, but it has a place in the essential toolbox. Your local Ace Hardware sells a kit with tool, extra needles, and waxed thread.

—KK

The Speedy Stitcher Sewing Awl Kit

\$16
Stewart Mfg. Co.
PO Box 643
Northboro, MA 01532

Or Ace Hardware

MAGIC SINEWAVES - A brand new method of achieving super energy efficiency in power electronics. I have ten years of my life tied up in developing this.

PIC MICROPROCESSORS - Several library pages include dozens of tutorial and a definitive collection of many hundreds of useful links and resources.

HYDROGEN ENERGY - Hydrogen is only an inefficient and rather wasteful energy carrier. I attempt to strip away the wide-eyed fantasies and leave you with real-world tutorials, books, and links to genuinely useful and promising emerging alternate energy resources.

POSTSCRIPT AND AROBAT PDF - I'm very big on PostScript as a general purpose computing language. Extensive support and highly detailed tutorials and utilities can be found on these pages.

TECH MUSINGS - Has multi topic mini-tutorials on a wide range of electronic, energy, and computer topics. Subjects include video techniques; a definitive page on cubic (Bezier) splines; advanced math techniques; navigation resources; unmerciful pseudoscience bashing; Santa Claus machines (aka rapid prototyping); wavelets; and, of course, tinaja questing.

BLATANT OPPORTUNIST - Unique tutorials and insid-

Hiring Smart!

How to Predict Winners and Losers in the Incredibly Expensive People-Reading Game

Hire smart, your company wins; hire dumb, you die. People are the scare resource in the new economy, but no one teaches employees how to hire people. Successful fast-growing companies have caught on. They now hire people who are good at hiring others. Between these book covers is a million dollars' worth of hiring advice, the best anywhere. If you are in business, ignore at your peril.

—KK

Hiring Smart!

How to Predict Winners and Losers in the Incredibly Expensive People-Reading Game

Pierre Mornell
1998, 226 pages
\$25
Ten Speed Press

You can't spend too much time or effort on "hiring smart." The alternative is to manage tough, which is much more time consuming.

The best predictor of future behavior is past behavior.

Strategy No.3: Give an assignment before the interview. Ask the candidate to visit one of your stores, plants, campuses, offices, or Web pages before the interview. Then ask for the candidate's observations.

Strategy No.5: Read resumes in teams if possible. It's helpful—and faster—to read the top candidates' resumes in teams of three to five people. Teams that work well together are more accurate and insightful about potential employees than individuals are.

Strategy No.6: Cast the widest net possible. Microsoft

er secrets for the home business and small scale tech startups. Coverage includes webmastering, product development, and emerging tech opportunities.

RESOURCE BIN - A complete archive of my earlier Nuts & Volts print columns on a wide range of technical resources, such as flutterwumper robotics.

PATENTS - Attempts to shatter the outrageously "not even wrong" myths surrounding patents and patenting. Provides thoroughly tested and working real world alternatives.

INFOPACKS - This is my very low cost "cash and carry" service that gets you quick answers in a less formal manner than a full blown consulting program. It is particularly strong in pinning down resources and evaluating fundamental concepts.

Finally, my **INCREDIBLE SECRET MONEY MACHINE** is undergoing a major revision and rewrite at the present time.

—Don Lancaster

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assumes that the best candidates are not looking for jobs. In fact, candidates who approach Microsoft are actually less attractive to the company.

Strategy No.13: Ask all your questions at once. That's right. Put all your initial questions on the table up front. This strategy accomplishes three things. First, in a manner of speaking, you pass the baton. You've asked the questions, now the candidate must respond. Performance depends upon the candidate, not selling yourself and the organization. Second, more importantly, this strategy directly confronts the most common problem in interviewing: not listening, and talking too much...Third, this technique forces you to listen. If there's one practical tip you should try in your next interview, I suggest this one. Asking all your questions at once, and following up later in the interview, allows you to settle back and watch a candidate's behavior as well as listen to his or her words.

Strategy No. 15: Assign a mini-project to finalists. Three quarters of the way through the interview, give the candidate a task to perform. Not only does this demonstrate the candidate's behavior—it also breaks up the monotony of most interviews.

Strategy No. 32: Ask the references to call you back. Here is the simplest, most effective reference check that I know. It's also fast and legal. Call references at what you assume will be their lunchtime—you want to reach an assistant or voice mail. If it's voice mail, leave a simple message. If it's an assistant, be sure that he or she understands the last sentence of your message. You say: "John (or Jane) Jones is a candidate for (the position) in our company. Your name has been given as a reference. Please call me back if the candidate was outstanding."

The results are both immediate and revealing. If the candidate is outstanding or excellent, I guarantee that eight out of ten people will respond quickly and want to help....However, if only two or three of then references selected by the candidate return your call, this message is also loud and clear. And yet:

No derogatory information has been shared.

No libelous statements have been made.

No confidence or laws have been broken.

Strategy No. 39: Invest in people, not ideas.

Unfortunately, an employer's ability to hear bad news about a potential employee is inversely proportional to the time spent courting that employee.