By Jack Wallen

Raise your hand if you've nearly quit your job on at least a few occasions. Go on. You don't have to be shy. We all know that IT is one of the more stressful careers you can choose. And unfortunately, universities don't teach you coping mechanisms for getting through the days/weeks/months that can turn into long years. Let's take a look at a few reasons you might decide to leave that beloved career in IT.

1: Stress

Don't let anyone ever tell you that a career in IT is easy going. It's a rare occasion that someone will have a job in the IT field where there isn't stress. Remember, IT is *disaster management*. When a client or user calls you, it's almost always an emergency that must be taken care of immediately. And when you are working on those jobs, you had better get everything right, as failure could cost you a contract or a job. What makes this worse is that the stress rarely lets up. Every minute of the day, you are working and working harder than you might expect.

2: Hours

If you want a Monday through Friday, 9-to-5 job, look elsewhere -- IT seems to be a job you carry around with you 24/7. Not only do you put in more hours in the office (or the field) than your average professional, you also have to work outside the office to keep your skills up and make sure you're better than the guy standing next to you. And the people who aren't your clients or users (friends and family, for example) will want to take advantage of your knowledge and keep their computers running smoothly for free.

3: Getting paid

If you are an independent contractor, one of the most stressful issues you face is getting paid. I can't tell you how many consultants I know who have had to make threats or use an attorney to get paid. And when you're freelancing, if they don't pay you, you don't eat. That is some serious stress there. You don't have the advantage of having that regular check coming in weekly or biweekly. Honing your interpersonal skills is key to keeping those relationships as good as possible. Good relationships (even with not-so-good people) will go a long way to make sure you do eventually get paid.

4: People (in general)

This one I hate to mention. A long time ago, I was a very positive, upbeat, people-loving kind of person. But after being in the consulting business, I've found myself getting taken advantage of, used, abused, unpaid, underpaid, unappreciated, and more. It's a constant fight to resist wanting to retreat to the woods and off the grid. That is not to say that people, in general, are bad. It's just that when you have your IT hat on, people seem to look at you in a different light. You are both savior and sinner in one stressed-out package.

5: The chain of command

Let's face it. Not many higher-ups understand your job. They think you should be able to get everything done on a shoestring budget, with no help, and you should treat end users as if they were better humans than yourself. And to make matters worse, the higher-ups want you to magically make those PCs last for more than a decade. This misunderstanding of both duty and technology does one thing: It makes your job impossible. When the powers-that-be begin to micromanage your department for you, every single bad element is exacerbated. You know your job and you know you know your job. Management does not know your job, but they don't know they don't know your job. It's all a vicious Mobius strip of stress.

6: Technology

Have you ever had one of those days when it seems like the whole of technology has rebelled against you and it looks like the singularity might very well be on the horizon? Those days will have you wishing you were walking out of the building with your belongings in a cardboard box. This has been one of the issues I have had to deal with since working with a consultancy that deals primarily with Windows clients. It seems that entropy has a strong hold on the Windows operating system, and every day is a battle to keep PCs and systems working. Some days you win that battle, some days you lose it. The days you win are always lost in the pile of days you lose.

7: Competition

One thing you can count on -- there will always be someone better than you. But in the IT industry, it isn't a 1:1 ratio. Instead, it seems that for every one of you there are one hundred IT pros who are smarter, faster, and better equipped. That ratio is quickly realized in dollar signs. Remember, the IT landscape is constantly changing, and if you can't keep up, you may not be hired or remain employed. The longer I am in this business, the more I realize it's a young person's game. Being as agile as necessary, being able to work the necessary hours... it all adds up. I'm not saying us older folks can't run with the pack. We can. But every day we work is another day even more competition is added to the field, and the competition is fierce.

8: The cloud

Every time I hear an actor on TV speak the phrase "to the cloud" I want to pull out my hair and kick in the television. The cloud has been one of those aspects of IT whose definition has been, and probably always will be, in flux. What exactly is the cloud? Should I be using it? Is the cloud safe? How much does the cloud cost? I get hit with these questions all the time. Generally, I just answer by asking the clients if they've used Google Docs before. If they say "yes," I tell them they are already using the cloud. But that is never satisfying. Clients and end users want the cloud to be some magical experience that will make all their work easier, better, and faster. If only they knew the truth.

9: Lack of standards

Our lives would be infinitely better if some sort of standards could be applied, across the board, in IT. Many open source projects have done everything they can to achieve a set of standards, only to be knocked down by proprietary software. Those proprietary software vendors want to keep their code closed and not compliant with standards so they can keep their bottom line as padded as possible. I get that, I really do. But while they are refusing to conform to any sort of standard, they are causing end users and IT pros any number of horrendous headaches on a daily basis. There is no reason why standards can't be followed without preventing proprietary software vendors from making a killing.

10: Respect

The general public has a bad taste in its mouth for IT professionals. Why? There are many reasons. They've been burned before. They've been ripped off before. They've had consultants who only seemed to want to sell them bigger and better things. So long has this gone on, and so jaded has the public become, that IT pros have a hard time earning respect. Oh sure, when they see you walk in the door you are their best friend... for the moment. But the minute you get that one "impending doom" issue resolved, it's time to go off on you or insist you do more than they hired you to do (or more than you have time to do).