

## Dear COMMON Colleague,

**Y**ou may very well be reading this at COMMON's 2008 Annual Meeting and Expo in Nashville, Tennessee. If you are, thank you for coming! You are participating in the largest event of its kind anywhere in the world, and because of that you have a unique opportunity for an experience you just can not get any other way.



Randy Dufault

If you are the one in charge of the budget for conference attendance and you are either at the Annual Meeting or you sent some of your staff in your place, thank you too. And, assuming you are not here already, maybe you can consider attending our annual IT Executive Conference, held each year in conjunction with the Annual Meeting.

In my experience, the wealth of things that everyone brings back from a conference event is almost immeasurable. Sure, there is new knowledge: knowledge about i5/OS, knowledge about new things from IBM, and knowledge about vendor products. Sure, there is collateral material from both IBM and the vendors. But there is always something more, something that is understandably difficult to identify and understandably even more difficult to quantify.

Sure, you can learn a lot just browsing the Internet. In fact, I credit my start in technology to a browsing sort of experience. A small company I worked for had a falling out with their programming consultant—the guy just sort of disappeared—yet they needed to get some unfinished development projects done. I had taken a programming class in High School so I at least had a vague idea of what was involved. Since the Internet was only a figment of someone's imagination at that time, I bought a couple of hobbyist magazines, poked around a bit, and got some problems solved. It seemed like a lot of fun, so I went back to school and changed careers.

That initial learning effort took a long time, and I am sure I developed some pretty bad habits and lots of pretty awful code.

My learning experience with what we now call i5/OS was completely different. Our company, a System/36 shop that had never seen a System/38, received an early ship AS/400 to use in a customer project. It was supposed to run just like a System/36 right? Yeah right! Needless to say neither I nor any of my coworkers

had a clue what was going on inside that beige rack. We needed to learn and time was of the essence.

An IBMer suggested the upcoming COMMON conference might be a good learning option. So I was off to Toronto where I attended what was the first of what is now 20 years of COMMON meetings. I have to say that for me, it was far and away the best way to hit the ground running with that awesome new machine.

Sure, I learned stuff in the sessions. Sure, I poked around the IBM technology area. But more than that, I met some of the folks that built the system and I met some folks who knew and understood the System/38. Interacting with those folks helped me put a context around all the books and lectures. That context allowed me to go back to my beige rack and quickly make it do what needed to be done.

In 1983 **Howard Gardner**, a professor of education at Harvard University, published his theory of multiple intelligences. I will let you go look up the details, but the essence of the theory is that any individual's learning happens eight different ways. Reading the printed page or printed screen falls into

only one of those eight. While a COMMON Annual Meeting experience might not hit all eight, from what I can tell, it gets pretty darn close.

So what you bring back from a COMMON Annual Meeting is much more than a pile of handouts and Expo goodies. There are new connections, refreshed past connections and lots of knowledge—not just learning, knowledge. That includes new knowledge about the system, knowledge about the future, and knowledge that will help both you and your company do everything just a bit better.

And if attending the COMMON Annual Meeting every year doesn't work out for you, don't forget about the other exciting COMMON conference events, COMMON Focus and, new for 2008, COMMON Directions.

While I know that I can usually figure something out from just reading a book or browsing the Internet, I also know that is not necessarily the best way and certainly is not the most efficient way. For me, and I am sure for almost everyone, the conference experience, including COMMON's Annual Meeting and Expo, is a much better way to grow in my profession and grow as an individual.

Sincerely,

Randy Dufault  
COMMON President  
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## Submitting Requirements to IBM

By Ron Newman

In an effort to allow our COMMON members' voices to be heard at IBM, we need to focus on getting requirements from our members. The COMMON Americas Advisory Council (CAAC) has done a great job of giving IBM their requirements, and now we would like to expand that to all COMMON and iSociety members.

You've all heard the famous song, "Follow the Yellow Brick Road." Well, if you have tried to enter a requirement from the COMMON website or the iSociety website, you may have felt like Dorothy searching for OZ, with the path to requirements filled with dead ends, traps, and frustration.

The good news is that the requirements team from the Advocacy pillar of COMMON has changed all that. They have designed new paths that make it easier to review requirements and to enter requirements. From the COMMON website's "Members Only" tab, when you click on the "Requirements" link, you will go directly to the iSociety discussion page where you will find two new icons:


one to review requirements, and the other to enter a requirement. You will need your COMMON or iSociety user id and password to access this page. From the iSociety page, there is also now a link named "Requirements" which takes you to the discussion page that has the two new icons on it.

On the page where you enter a requirement, there are some mandatory fields. These are meant to help the team communicate with you for further definition of the requirement, and to keep you informed on the progress of your requirement throughout the process. The mandatory fields are Name, Phone, E-mail Address, Title, Problem Description, and Business Impact. You can also review all of the requirements, as well as make comments, rate it, and add helpful information.

**The Process:** Right now we are in Phase One of making requirements easier to input, review, and process to IBM. The process today is that when you enter a requirement, a member of the requirements team reviews the requirement (making sure it is clear and

well thought out) and gathers additional information if necessary. The team also reviews all requirements to see if the requirement you entered has already been posted by someone else. Then the group member manually fills out a CAAC requirement form. The reason for this is so IBM has one point of contact when replying to requirements. When IBM replies to the requirement you entered, that same requirement group member will post a notice in your requirement on iSociety.

As you can see, this is a manual process. In the future (Phase Two) we hope to streamline the process, as well as reinstate the voting process for requirements which was, at one time, an extremely popular benefit for COMMON members.

So, follow the fast path to Requirements and let IBM know what your needs are for the System! 

### About the Author

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