

Why I Aeropress Coffee but Automate Everything Else

Many of my presentations start with me quoting the Rule of Three. Then I tell you three things about myself:

1. I'm lazy
2. I despise inconsistency
3. Did I mention I'm lazy?

The reason that these are important things to know is that being lazy is a fundamental reason why I have leapt into automation from early on in my career.

Being the Right Kind of Lazy

The word lazy can sound like a bad thing. In the case of automation, it is a good thing. Clarence Bleicher of Chrysler was once quoted in the early days of the company as saying:

“When I have a tough job in the plant and can't find an easy way to do it,” Mr. Bleicher said, “I have a lazy man put on it. He'll find an easy way to do it in 10 days. Then we adopt that method.”

That pretty much sums it up. Laziness in the sense of not wanting to do repetitive, mundane tasks is the kind of laziness that we are aspiring for here. Not just lay down and do nothing lazy, as tempting as that is.

There was a key moment that happened in my first year of my work. When I saw a way to make something faster, or more efficient by taking safe and appropriate shortcuts, I took them. When I made the leap into a technology career, it didn't take long to find the shortcuts. That was the whole idea of technology after all!

I drive a Stick Shift and Aeropress my Coffee

The reason that I personally do a lot of automation is so that I can choose to take the additional time I have to put towards the removal of other technical debt or even just enjoying myself. Part of the fun dichotomy of many of the very pro-automation technologists is that a lot of us tend to also be huge coffee enthusiasts. I'm talking about the hand-grind, slow steep, Aeropress and nearly scientific recipe kind of coffee people. Shouldn't a lazy, automation-oriented person try to eliminate the time being spend on that effort? Ahhhh...there is the interesting part.



Automation needs to be in service of the goal. The goal is quality. I could increase my output by putting a Keurig or a Nespresso, or some kind of automated espresso machine. That rolls up to additional costs, and then the quality of the taste. My choice is to take the lower cost to get a handcrafted taste that I know I enjoy. I have also done the math and realize that it may amortize over the long run to buy the machine, but I can also use my Aeropress on road trips and such. That is the consistency target I choose.

My choice to drive a manual transmission was primarily about cost, and secondarily around the enjoyment of it. That is really all there is to it. The time/effort savings of having an automatic impacts my personal enjoyment of the experience which I don't necessarily feel is worth it.

Knowing and Measuring your Goal

How we define quality is as important as how we achieve it. Without a tangible way to measure the results of automation and the net effect on quality, we can end up just acquiring more technical debt, or in spending time on tasks that don't remove constraints at the right level. Just like with my Aeropress and my manual transmission, I have chosen my measurement of where I can achieve quality through automation to attack other constraints.

Personal coffee taste is somewhat intangible. The time you spend deploying servers to the cloud and running patch management routines and other repetitive tasks is very tangible. Between time and quality, the effort to automate many operational tasks pays off rather quickly. Having had a

background in desktop support at the onset of my enterprise IT career, I quickly created scripts and processes to avoid doing those repetitive tasks. Put all of that on a server and then all I need to do manually is connect to the server. Voila!

Measure your quality in either time, cost, or sometimes in those intangible ways such as just personal enjoyment of the work. If you are spending hours in a week doing repetitive work, you could spend a little time automating it and then spending that time you gain back the following weeks into new work and more exciting tasks.

Measure always, and not just for you, but for your team and your organization. Then you can sit back and make a nice Aeropress coffee while you watch your automation work happening for you.