Why the X is So Important

I was asked recently what my best strength or skill is as a writer and trainer, and I answered simply, “Empathy.”

This surprised the person who asked because he expected me to say an application like Word or my ease with being up in front of people or my ability to pick up things quickly. Certainly all those are important as are a host of others, but over the years I’ve come to realize that what drives me to do what I do is empathy. Empathy for users.

I have empathy for users because I'm a user. We all are, of course, but not everyone sees that especially when they're in the expert seat of developer whether it's developing an app or content. I always see it. I always see them. The users.

That doesn't mean I write or present simplistic content. Not even close. It does mean that I make sure my content is approachable, understandable, and complete, in that order. It also means that I evaluate and test my content, and any associated app, with the intent to address what users may wonder about or struggle with in addition to what they need to know.

It’s all about the X.

The key for me, and should be for everyone, is how much concern you have for the X, i.e., the user experience. If you do, you develop with that foremost in mind. I’m not taking away from anything by favoring the X. In fact, because the X means different things to different levels of users, it makes me more aware of all users.

As an example, when I wrote online help systems, I worked from overview to detail. You'll find every jot and tittle you need in my systems. All users need that. What you'll also find—and I did this with my very first one in 2003 on through the rest—is that my systems begin with my version of an FAQ called *How Do I…* where that is the name of the topmost section which contains short topics that complete the question. My concern for the X was to provide answers to what entry level users would need to know on a Friday afternoon when everyone was gone and they had no one to ask how to do what they needed to meet a Monday deadline.

So a *How Do I…* targeted to inexperienced users to help them transition quicker to being an expert user by taking out the initial frustration of using an app, and an easy to traverse hierarchy and plenty of detail to make it better when they are expert users.

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