



The Taos Effect: Creating Community

By [Coco Brown](#), Taos President and COO

In the twelve years that I've been with the company, Taos has always been three things at its core: a place for techies to be understood, a place for customers to find true partnership and high value, and a place that provides community for both. The two founders, Ric and Alexis, are still the self-proclaimed "techies" they were when the company was first formed. Although these days what we mostly see is a world class sales guy and relationship master (Ric) and a super intellectual capable of amazing expression (Alexis), still their "geekiness" shines through from time to time. From the always to be expected birthday gathering question of, "Do you know how old you'd be in hexadecimal?" to the game they play in our monthly financial review meetings of who can beat whom to the punch on some complex mathematical formula to predict the direction of a key Taos performance indicator (or the NASDAQ) - it's there. It's this techie in them that created the inspiration for Taos and that is behind the core elements of who we are.

Ever since the early days when they would invite all 20 consultants or so to the home office on Fridays for beer and an inevitable whiteboard session on Unix kernel development, Taos has been highly involved in the ongoing development of the IT community as a whole. And that involvement has been on a larger scale than we could have ever imagined. We've employed thousands of people (nearly all of them are still working actively in IT and many are in very senior positions), and our technical candidate database has passed 70,000 records. A huge percentage of the Bay Area IT community has been part of our process at some point or another. We've touched many lives and careers and so many people have been instrumental in our commitment to be involved and to contribute during their time with Taos; people like [Cindy Smith](#), Mike Masterson, [George Herbert](#), [Darren Dunham](#), [Tom Jackiewicz](#), [Herman Knief](#), [Mark Langston](#), yours truly and many, many more. I reached out to a few of those listed here and reminisced with them about how we've helped shape a Taos community for techies and clients alike. (If you feel I've missed anything or anyone worth mentioning, please email me at coco@taos.com and I will make sure we mention it on our Facebook page).

Top of mind for everyone are our financial contributions and team member contributors to societies such as USENIX, SAGE, SVLUG, the ACM, and BayLISA. In fact, we were a founding member of the USENIX Systems Administrator's Guild (SAGE). Back when we were "The Sys Admin Company," we participated to a very significant extent in the shaping of some of the thinking and products of these organizations, and where needed, hosted meetings for their governing bodies. **For me, we made one of our most notable contributions when SAGE requested to use Taos' skills matrices as the foundation for forming the questions that they needed to build a Systems Administrator's leveling systems open widely to the public.** This was a labor of love from so many contributors including a number of our technical practice leaders.

Our Taos consultants have helped shape the community in other ways as well. Many have actively contributed to internet mailing lists, websites and blogs about technical matters and IT management. Some Taosers have written books including Tom Jackiewicz's book on "Deploying OpenLDAP," Herman Knief, Michael Masterson, Eric Roul and Scott Vinick's book on "Windows NT DNS," and Herman Knief, Rodger Abell, Andrew Daniels, and Jeff Graham's book on "Windows 2000 DNS." Many Taosers have also contributed conference papers and presentations. For example, Darren Dunham was one of the presenters at a Guru Session on storage technologies at the USENIX 2004 technical conference.

Back in the late 90's and 2000, we formed T3's, Taos Tech Talks, to further build community. There were some great ones! As Cindy Smith recollects, one "out of control event was a talk by Randal Schwartz (post his conviction), where he told an entranced audience that the password he cracked of the then Vice President of Security at Intel was "President" with S substituted by a dollar sign." If you don't know the case, it's worth some "Google-time." **Another big community builder was the truly historical event Taos hosted on "The Future of Linux" in July 1998.** There were 1000 people in attendance and Linus was the key-note speaker, just one month before he appeared on the cover of Forbes. Others on the panel included Larry Augustin (now CEO of SugarCRM, then founder of VA Linux - which is now sourceforge), Jeremy Allison, one of the lead developers of Samba, and Sunil Saxena from Intel. There are still some great recounts of this event on the web; one of which can be found at www.gregroelofs.com/reports/linux-19980714-top.html. Those were, as we say, "the good old days."

In the 2000's, post dotcom bust – or as we call it "modern times" – our community participation has morphed into



hosting events and groups with a heavier emphasis on IT leadership than on technology itself. We've all aged and matured, and the business of running IT has matured. Our offerings have diversified and, continuing to build on our core of great technical talent, we now offer advisory services, project delivery and managed services. Our clients span the gamut from the line manager to the CIO, and not just in infrastructure anymore, but in applications and engineering, too. So of course we are compelled as well to diversify the ways we get involved.

We still participate at a technological level with the community via groups like our TAC (Taos Architecture Consortium) with participation from our technical Practice Leaders, heads of architecture from our client companies, and top architects from within their teams. But now, in addition, we participate at a business focused level as well. For example, we recently sponsored the IIBA's (International Institute of Business Analysis) 5th anniversary event which brought 10 CIOs into discussion with top BAs from around the Bay Area to help them continue their dialogue on maturing that profession. Another distinguished example is our IT Directions, ***a Bay Area notable event attended by over 100 CIOs and senior members of the CIO's staff. This coming spring will be our 12th one!*** And I'm on my 17th Women in IT Leadership Dinner, an event I host every 45 days or so specifically for women CIOs or equivalent roles. So as you can see, we strive to balance our community participation between the "techie" in Taos and the "leader" in Taos to better serve our clients and staff.

But it's not just our "techie" or business-focused event contributions that are worth noting. There are also the everyday contributions our Taos consultants provide to all our clients. We have uncountable letters, emails, and other forms of client appreciation that we have collected over the years. As George Herbert, a Taoser of 12 years and a Practice Leader in our longest standing practice (Unix Systems Administration) puts it, "Taosers are very good at what they do; some have particularly stood out, and client managers and others at our client companies have let us know - the migration that was pulled off without a hitch, the days and days of work when the site crashed, a Taoser who walked in to a demoralized and ineffective IT team and helped motivate and train and coordinate their coworkers. Our old office had wall after wall after wall of client appreciation letters - a visible symbol of the impact Taos consultants have had for our clients."

So I guess I'd like to say our contributions speak for themselves, but our memories are short and sometimes one really does need to reflect and take pride in significant accomplishments. Not only are we proud to have been in business for 20 years, we are proud to be an integral part of the Bay Area IT community. We couldn't have done it without the many, many amazing people who make up our employee and client base! Thank you all.

Cheers,

Coco