To All Wizards of the World

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With the country going crazy about a boy wizard named Harry Potter (even my 7 year old has been read all five books and seen 2 movies dozens of times), I set to thinking about the role of the document assembly consultant in society of non-believers and came up with the idea of "Muggle Studies 102". It started out as a workshop on project management and became ... well you'll see if you read on. Enjoy.

SETTING: Harry Potter, Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger are now entering their fifth year at the Hogwarts School of Wizardry. In addition to the regular curriculum, there is a new required course to be taught by Ron Weasley's dad Arthur, titled "Muggle Studies 102". Professor Weasley, as you all know, is a specialist in dealings with Muggles, also known as humans who lack the ability to perform magic.

BACKGROUND: Harry Potter is the boy wizard with the lightning scar. Ron Weasley, his best friend, is from a long line of wizards. Hermione Granger, the smartest student in Hogwarts, is born of Muggle parents. In addition there is Neville Longbottom, a wizard who can't perform magic. And there is Harry's evil rival, Draco Malfoy.

PROF. WEASLEY: Hello wizards and welcome to Muggle Studies 102. This is a course about Muggles. Today's class is on Muggle technology, tools that are used by Muggles to achieve what most wizards can accomplish with an incantation of a spell and a swish of a wand. This class focuses on computer technology and software, the prime means by which Muggles can proximate magic.

DRACO MALFOY (Interrupting): This course is a waste of time! Muggles have nothing to offer us. They are thick-skulled and superstitious. How can we learn anything from them?

PROF. WEASLEY: Any other thoughts ... Yes, Hermione.

HERMIONE GRANGER: My Dad, who is a Muggle, uses a device called a computer, to do all sorts of things.

HARRY POTTER: The Dursley's are too stupid to use computers. But they do know how to use a telephone. Aunt Petunia is on the phone all day. It is practically attached to her ear. [Mrs. Dursley is Harry's Aunt. When Harry isn't at Hogwarts, he lives with the Dursley's who despise him and are very very suspicious of anything magical.]

PROF. WEASLEY: Neville. Do you have a question?

NEVILLE LONGBOTTOM: Uhhhh! What are computers?

PROF. WEASLEY: Later Neville. In due course, I will explain Muggle technology. Now, today we are going to deal with a special type of Muggle, called a lawyer and the technology used by lawyers. Lawyer Muggles spend most of the day helping people resolve disputes. Some of the disputes are resolved before judges. Other disputes, are resolved by agreements that explain the responsibilities of each of the parties. And these agreements usually are written down. Can anyone tell me how wizards draft "legal agreements?"

DRACO: My dad is always sending off owls to people with long written parchments [Wizards send their mail by owl post, attaching parchments to the claws of the bird and telling the bird who to bring the parchment to].

PROF. WEASLEY: But how does he write the words on the parchment?

DRACO (Sneering): You mean does he take a quill pen and dip it in ink? No way! That would be beneath him. Dad picks up his wand and tells the quill, I want an agreement that will do such and such and will be between me and so and so. The quill then does the writing. And if he has any questions, he summons another wizard and asks him a question. If the wizard is alive, Dad talks to him through the fireplace floo network. If the wizard is dead, he conjures him up from the dead and asks his advice.

PROF WEASLEY: So a wizard can draw on the collective knowledge of both living and dead wizards, and through incantations draft the appropriate legal agreement. And the document will be customized by the quill to properly describe the parties and terms.

DRACO: Muggles are too stupid to do that.

PROF WEASLEY: No Draco. Muggles are quite smart. But Muggles can't talk to spirits. And they don't have magic quill pens. Moreover, Muggles can live quite far apart making it difficult to meet with each other.

RON: Muggles can't fly on broomsticks or use the fireplace floo network. But they can make phone calls, drive cars, or take airplanes. Isn't that a solution?

PROF WEASLEY: Not exactly. The phone just carries voices, which may not be enough. And lawyer Muggles can have dozens of appointments and deadlines each day. Travel to meetings takes a lot of time. And add on top of that the time it takes to coordinate the schedules of several Muggles; it may take weeks before the meeting actually occurs.

HERMIONE: My Dad uses a computer to schedule his appointments.

PROF WEASLEY: To handle scheduling, Hermione is correct, some Muggles use computers to keep track of all their appointments, with programs like Outlook, GroupWise and Lotus Notes. Others, go a step further with group scheduling programs and case management programs like Time Matters, Amicus Attorney, Abacus Law, and ProLaw.

NEVILLE: What is case management? Is it just scheduling?

PROF. WEASLEY: No. Muggles, particularly lawyers, need to keep track of appointments, notes, tasks, events, phone calls and a myriad of details about their work. Think of a case management program as a house elf. You tell the house elf everything about your schedule, your work, your appointments, your thoughts. And it is the elf's job to make sure you get to each meeting, finish each task (including the tasks assigned to the house elf), and bring with you to your meetings everything you need. Like the house elf, you can ask the program all sorts of questions, like "When did I last do _____ ?" or "What did ___ and I talk about at the last meeting?" or "How long did we spend at the meeting and in preparation for that meeting?" You can also ask the program (just like the elf) to make a complete report of everything that happened last week.

HERMIONE: Wizards treat house elves like slaves. They should pay them a decent living wage.

PROF. WEASLEY: Hermione. Please keep your politics out of the classroom. ... Now, as I was saying: better control of the scheduling process can also be combined with collaboration tools that eliminate the need for physical meetings. There is video conferencing that allows you to see the person you are talking to. And, to allow, real collaboration, there are services like GoToMyPC.com and WebEx.com where Muggles can invite other Muggles to take joint control of a computer desktop, to share documents, and even edit a document together.

HERMIONE: Why would anyone fly an airplane when you could use GoToMyPC and a telephone video conference?

PROF. WEASLEY: Sometimes you need to meet people to get to know them and build a relationship based on trust and mutual interests. But once that

relationship is established, if you are merely seeking information and advice, the actual meeting is not required. And video conferencing functions much like the floo network, allowing you to be in two places at once.

HERMIONE: So you can have meetings without traveling. You can use case management programs to make sure the meetings occur. But what if the person you want to meet with is too busy, simply unavailable, or even dead?

PROF. WEASLEY: Muggles, particularly lawyers, have a habit of writing everything down. They used to use pen and paper. Then they used typewriters and carbon paper. Now most of them use computers with keyboards and screens. The words are saved in "files". The files are saved on the computer hard drives. And many save the files on "shared drives" so they can share their wisdom with others. If you know the name of the file, and where it is stored, you can retrieve the words of wisdom of a dead or unavailable Muggle.

NEVILLE: I am always forgetting my magic spells and using the wrong incantation. How can Muggles remember the proper filename or where the file is stored? What happens if you forget?

PROF. WEASLEY: That happens quite often since Muggles are very prolific. That's why Muggles have document management software. This software lets you create a profile to categorize the file by author, description, client/matter, and type of document. In addition, programs like iManage, DocsOpen, and Worldox allow Muggles to search for particular words or phrases across the entire shared drive. In a way, this is like summoning up a wizard of the past to find his words of wisdom.

HARRY: What do Muggles do once they find the right "file"? Don't they still need an expert to interpret and sift through the words of wisdom and rewrite them?

PROF. WEASLEY: That is true. Generally, Muggles will mark up a document and give the mark-up to a secretary to type. The document will go back and forth until the lawyer is happy with the result.

HARRY: Doesn't that take a lot of time?

PROF. WEASLEY: Many Muggle lawyers charge for their time by the hour. If it takes more time, they can charge more money. Up to a certain point of course. Some Muggle lawyers have gotten creative and decided they can charge by the project. So long as they deliver a quality product, the clients are happy, even if it takes the lawyer less time to do the work. Such an approach rewards efficiency and more particularly, automation. Lawyers who are very efficient can make a lot of money because they can handle more projects in the same amount of time, but still collect fees comparable to what they had charged when they were charging by the hour.

DRACO: Bah! Muggles can't be efficient. Most can't even tie their shoe laces so they don't come untied.

PROF. WEASLEY: Some Muggle lawyers have recognized that they are always making the same type of changes to certain types of documents. These Muggles have created templates of their most commonly used documents. Where they would change the text, they first inserted blanks and put in footnotes to explain how the blanks would be filled in. More enterprising Muggles began to use merge field codes found in their word processors. They could create a little wizard called a macro that would stop at each field code and ask them a question. The wizard would use the answers to complete the document.

HERMIONE: But you still can't talk to the wizard. What good is it to find out what he told other people when you have a new question that he had not specifically addressed?

PROF. WEASLEY: Very astute, Hermione. You can only learn so much from prior writings. And merge templates can go only so far. They only fill in the blanks in static documents. And you need to create a separate template for each possible circumstance. A lot of redundancy and an administrative nightmare to make consistent changes across the templates. What you really want to do is understand the thinking process of the wizard. What are the issues to be considered? How would the advice or approach differ if the facts were different?

RON: Nothing is as good as talking to the actual wizard or Muggle expert.

PROF. WEASLEY: Son, you are wrong. There is something almost as good, and in some circumstances better. The very reasoning process can be captured as a series of logical rules. This logic can be converted to a custom built document assembly application. And this application can serve as an expert in a box, dispensing wisdom and guidance in both simple and complex situations. Moreover, document assembly applications never ask for raises, always shows up for work, and don't make mistakes if used correctly. As you add more rules and logic, you can capture the expertise of several Muggles, and bring them to bear on a single project.

NEVILLE: The Muggles who create these document assembly applications must be real wizards.

PROF. WEASLEY: In a way, these Muggles are wizards. A good wizard can understand the arcane logic of the experts and also the difficult spells or incantations that are required to produce the document assembly application. A well-built document assembly application is like a complex potion. It can take weeks to pull all the ingredients together, and require assistance from many different people, each contributing their share of knowledge and reasoning. But once done, it will work its magic in an instant, and keep working again and again.

HARRY: Are these Muggle wizards appreciated for their special expertise?

PROF. WEASLEY: Sadly, they are not. Many don't appreciate the complexity of their work or the skill level required to create truly effective document assembly applications. Others view them with suspicion and hostility, much the same way the Dursley's view the world of wizards and magic. They don't understand how it works and the don't trust it.

[The clock tower strikes end of class]

PROF. WEASLEY: Time to go. Next week we will study Muggle Literature. Be sure to read your copy of "The Wizard of Oz" before the next class.