

# Provide User Support

## Information

These notes were originally written in the year 2000 as part of a set of LPI Exam 101 training materials. The LPI training course at Bromley College was subsequently discontinued and some of the sections of the notes modified and incorporated into our one-day System Administration Courses. The remainder of the notes have now been made publicly available on the [linuxtraining.org.uk](http://linuxtraining.org.uk) website.

If you are a beginner please do not be put off of training courses by these notes, as they are rather technical. On the other hand if you are a more experienced Linux user we hope you find the coverage of this topic refreshingly clear.

For full details of our current Linux training please visit the site:

<http://ce.bromley.ac.uk/linux>

If you have reached this page from a search engine and wish to see the full contents list for the published notes please visit the site:

<http://www.linuxtraining.org.uk>

We hope you find these notes useful, but please remember that they apply to the 2.2 kernel. I will update them when I have the time.

Clive Gould - 21<sup>st</sup> December 2004

# Provide User Support

## Objective 4

*Provide User Support : Provide technical assistance to users via telephone, email, and personal contact.*

### Providing Support

Help desks can range from one person with another job, which they do part time, to a dedicated department of several dozen people providing 24x7 support. However, the common factor with every helpdesk is that everyone they deal with has a problem.

If you are providing helpdesk support you will not only need to know the system inside out, but you will also need good communication skills and understand your users, both in terms of the level of their technical expertise and their emotional state. The best technical expert is no good at providing support unless they can both soothe the caller and solve the problem.

In providing support you will also have to maintain active relationships with external suppliers, because as well as providing support for installed products you are also likely to be involved with the evaluation of purchasing options. You will need to be skilled in managing and maintaining relationships with vendors.

In providing support to users it is important to clearly establish the nature of the problem from the outset. This is particularly true if you are not providing support in person but by telephone or email. If your contact is via the telephone you can ask questions to further define the problem. With written submissions, information may well be missing and an exchange of emails may be needed to establish the exact nature of the problem.

To define the problem you will need to ask the user questions such as:

- The location of the machine involved
- The exact wording of any error messages
- A specific account of what the user was doing when the error occurred, including what applications and/or peripherals were in use.

# Provide User Support

From the above information you should be able to gauge the urgency of the problem and provide an estimate of the amount of time it will take to sort it out. You should also notify the user if you cannot address the problem immediately and provide an estimate of when you, or someone else, will be available.

It is important to make the user feel they are part of the solution and be courteous, helpful and convey information clearly, without the use of unnecessary technical jargon. Remember that the job is not closed until the user says the problem is solved.

A helpdesk should run regular sampled surveys to gauge customer satisfaction. This can be used to both improve the performance of the helpdesk and aid its acceptance by users. It is also necessary for the successful helpdesk to work closely with the training department.

In an environment with a relatively small number of users to support, and good organisation on your part, you may be able to cope with using a paper based system for your helpdesk recording. As responsibilities grow helpdesk software can help you in a number of ways. Intranet based helpdesk software employing web technologies is becoming increasingly common.

At one end of the spectrum there is basic logging software which records calls and tracks responses. These products can help by recording individual problems, so that if there is a subsequent call and a different operative, the caller does not have to recount the entire problem. They can also help in analysing the most common types of problems so that recommendations for amendments to procedures, system configuration and future purchasing can be made.

At the other end of the scale there are intelligent expert systems which will accept a plain English query, ask appropriate questions to help solve the problem and then suggest an appropriate solution. In between these extremes are software products which act on key words and come up with possible diagnoses.

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Another factor in planning user support, which needs to be taken into account, is what happens in the event of a natural disaster. There needs to be preparation for a wide range of incidents, such as:

- Flooding
- Fire
- Network failure
- Major power failure
- Data loss or corruption
- Theft

Procedures to be followed in the above situations need to be established and practiced. It is particularly important to consider how the helpdesk copes with disasters if it is on the same site as the users. If the helpdesk is located across several locations it is far easier to plan because it would be extremely unlikely to have multiple sites simultaneously affected by the same disaster.