

## *Book Review*

# The Gift of Time

by Fiona Charles, Dorset House Publishing, New York, NY, 2008. 176 pp., \$31.95(paper). ISBN 978-0-932633-75-0.

**Reviewed by Charles Ashbacher**, Charles Ashbacher Technologies, Hiawatha, IA, USA, [cashbacher@yahoo.com](mailto:cashbacher@yahoo.com)

Relativistic contractions and expansions based on what you are doing aside, the day is exactly 24 hours long. Given the time needed for sleeping and other biological necessities, there is approximately 14 hours per day that can be spent in work and communication. Therefore, one of the greatest gifts most of us can give to others is quality time to educate and inform and that is the meaning of the title of the book.

Gerald Weinberg is deservedly a legend in the computing community for his long and illustrious career in exploring and then guiding the way for the development of complex computing systems. As you learn very quickly, one of his favorite phrases is “Compared to what?” In other words, whatever choice you make in life or software development, the value of that choice is a relative one. The cost in time, material and money of every action must be examined within the context of the consequences when you perform the action and compared to those of all other options. Which also includes the option of doing nothing or what may sometimes be considered equivalent, doing the same thing you did before.

What is most impressive about these descriptions of the actions of Weinberg is how widely applicable they are. People in computing tend to consider themselves isolated from others and how they do things, yet the strategies Weinberg developed and espouses can be applied in many different areas, even the training of service dogs.

With fifty years of experience behind him, Weinberg was almost literally there at the beginning of computing. As you can see from the comments about him, he is the closest thing to a Renaissance man that computing has ever had and probably ever will have. Reading this book will not give you any technical skills and may not even directly make you a better programmer or system designer. What it will give you is a deep appreciation for the value of people and analytical skills, for it is smart people who design efficient major systems and they do so by interacting and having skills that complement each other. Wienberg’s developmental approach of “rational irrationality” is one of considering all the options, even those that seem silly, unlikely or even absurd and his approach is a proven success.