

# Duane French: Dragon: A transformational force.

When Duane French was 14, he did a dumb thing, like many teenagers are prone to from time to time. Looking to escape the summer heat with some friends, he dove off a bridge. Unlike many teenagers, though, his act left him a quadriplegic. The year was 1968, and assistive technologies were still in their early stages.

He recalls: "I could type slowly with a pencil in my right hand using a pencil grip, but it was a slow and arduous process, so I charmed my way through college by asking young women to type my papers. Entering the workforce meant using the Dictaphone recorder to complete documents necessary for my job. It worked well, but it required numerous handoffs and was time- and labor-intensive."

When French saw the Apple II for the first time, "I knew computers would be a vital tool for my success," he says. He later became the Director of the Alaska Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, where one day he observed Dragon NaturallySpeaking in use. French remarks: "I was sold! I started using Dragon NaturallySpeaking in 1999 and have never stopped – I love it. The incredible advances in its speed and accuracy continue to astound me."

Today, French uses Dragon on his home and work desktop computers, as well as on his laptop, so it's always within reach. He's now the Director of the Washington State Division of Disability Determination Services, where he says he couldn't oversee 350 employees and a \$50 million budget without Dragon. He writes all his email with Dragon, and he uses it with Microsoft Word, Excel, and PowerPoint as he prepares documents, spreadsheets, and presentations.

French also has several employees with disabilities who employ Dragon for the same purposes he does – in addition, they use it with the department’s IBM AS/400-based system for billing and other administrative functions. He also works with doctors who serve as medical consultants for his department, some of whom use Dragon for writing case notes for their analyses of disability claims.

**Transforming a personal life too**

At home, French uses Dragon to write entries for his blog, interact with friends and family on Facebook,

compose poetry, write emails and letters, and use Adobe Photoshop for such tasks as captioning photos.

French adds: “In fact, using Dragon helped me communicate with a beautiful woman in Washington State who is the love of my life. After many long months and long emails, I moved to the Pacific Northwest so we could begin our life together.” He says: “I feel helpless without Dragon NaturallySpeaking. It has been a transformational force in my life and has helped make the success I once dreamed of a reality.”

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