
FEATURE ARTICLE

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For Immediate Publication

Do You Suffer From Technology Intimidation?

By Steve Epner

Have you ever felt intimidated by technology? Many people feel a great deal of anxiety when automation is brought into their workspace. Most people do not even want to admit to being intimidated. Yet, these same people have VCRs flashing 12:00 at home. Signs of intimidation are all around. We only have to look.

Before my grandfather died, he had to deal with changes, which were very disruptive. As a young man, he used a horse and buggy to get around. He saw the introduction of electricity and automobiles. Then there were airplanes, machines that would take men into the sky. He never believed in them. He always took a bus. My grandmother was more adventuresome; she would fly and then meet gramps two or three days later.

Imagine how the world seemed to change. Try to understand the acceptance of things we take for granted. Yet, they survived. So can we.

When change is introduced into an environment, it always causes fear. There is the fear of the unknown. There is a fear that "I" will not be able to understand or learn the new "stuff." There is the fear that it will eliminate what I am doing.

All of these fears are real. However, for many managers, it is always happening to someone else. We feel for them, but go on preaching the benefits of new policies and procedures. That is until it changes our world. Then it becomes real.

Yet, technological change does not have to defeat us. For generations, humans have adapted to changes in their surroundings. Most of the time, the long-term result was progress.

New technologies have continuously improved the quality of life. Today, we live longer and

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better due to advancements in many fields. Each one forced individuals to alter the way they worked.

It is important for those of us who are able to adapt to new environments to be willing to assist the rest. We cannot allow change to be stymied. That would spell disaster for the organizations that support us. We must make change, especially that caused by automation, understandable and useable by the people we rely on to get the work done.

Most can be trained -- notice the word is not re-trained -- to handle new procedures without loss of their ego. The secret is to do it slowly and with assistance from those affected. Form teams to train together. In every case, help them understand how the new processing will help the organization survive. Explain how the new procedures will improve the products and services offered by the organization.

Find ways to reward the staff for their successful efforts. Do not fire those who help the most -- that is the wrong message to send. Even small rewards will encourage others to be part of the future.

Beware, management personnel can be the most difficult to help. Many grew up believing that their value is directly related to the size of their departments. If their staff is cut, so is their worth.

We must reorient managers to measure their contribution to the organization. Getting more work done with the same or fewer resources is worth dollars on the bottom line. This needs to be recognized and rewarded if it is to be emulated.

In some cases, individuals will fight any change. Attempts to help will be rebuffed. It is best to move them out of the affected operation. Make it as painless as possible, but do not allow them to sabotage the future.

My grandfather saw a man land on the moon. He may have thought it was a movie and never really happened. Us younger folks can laugh at that. Yet, we are the same people who do not want to believe that the computer can eliminate much of what we do today. Who is being fooled? Are we any different? Have we learned nothing from the changes that occurred in the past?

Change is disruptive to the human being. It is rarely welcomed. It does have the possibility to greatly improve our lives. It will change the way we do things. It may force us to modify some things that we know. It is up to our leaders to plan for and assist the rest of us to accept change and make it work. Someone has to step back and help us accept what is happening and see the

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benefit or there will be none. If you are able to adapt to the new ways, take a minute to help someone else, we will all create a better world if we do.

Steve Epner has been directing traffic on the information super highway since 1966. A highly regarded industry expert, Epner is widely published and has provided comment for national business publications including the *Wall Street Journal*. His experience in business, technology and strategic planning makes him a nationally renowned technical speaker. Epner can be reached at sepner@bswllc.com.

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