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TECHNOLOGY

Understanding Your Audience: The Key To Technology Adoption

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We have all seen the headlines like, "Company throws out new system after spending millions." However, when you drill down into it, our "worst nightmare" can be prevented. It requires balanced attention between the technology "tools" and the people who must implement them.

The importance of technology adoption is highlighted by the experience of Danny with ABC Distributing. He was taking over day-to-day management of the family business from his uncle. His first step was a technology project — a new inventory system to help turn the company around. They were experiencing lost sales and high inventory costs from overstocking because ABC didn't have a handle on the correct quantity and location of inventory items in its warehouses.

ABC Distributing had done the right thing by having its needs evaluated and identified correctly. Its new system was installed with high anticipation and expectation. Soon, though, there was disappointment and concern that the investment might not bring the value expected. Inventory numbers were still inaccurate.

Danny's immediate reaction was that the software was at fault, but he found otherwise when he investigated. He learned that when technology is involved it is not unusual for employees to put up barriers to success. He realized some employees were concerned and scared about the new technology. They didn't feel they could catch on or learn to use it correctly or that, even worse, once in place it could eliminate their job. These apprehensions lead to stress and a general push-back against the change. This was taking a toll on Danny's plans to improve ABC's bottom line with more tightly managed inventory.

The functionality was all there as he understood at the beginning. The new system was capable of meeting his needs. The challenge was to get his people "on board." The carrot: It had to be viewed as a win for them. He needed a new approach, and he found one and took it to heart.

By the time his next meeting with his team was completed, Danny was already seeing a different reaction. Danny got ABC Distributors focused on its new direction by taking the following steps with his people:

- He reviewed the challenges in the business and explained why there needed to be a change.
- He explained his "Vision" for what the new reality would look like and that it included all of the team.
- He provided opportunities to his team for input and involvement and showed willingness, where appropriate, to adjust based on the feedback.
- He showed the benefits of the change and how each team member would see those benefits.
- He reviewed how the implementation would progress as well as the team's role.
- He explained the consequences (what will be left behind and what will be different after the change and how day-to-day operations will be affected).
- He recognized roadblocks by showing that planning and implementation problems had been considered and worked into the plan.

Once people understood their part and the benefits, they began to come on board. Within a few months, Danny was hearing his clients comment on improved service. He saw his inventory carrying costs reduced, and his team felt good about the new system because they had a part in the implementation.

So how can you prepare your team or help your clients prepare their team for changes brought by technology? You should plan at the beginning to incorporate the steps Danny followed his second time around. It is easier up front, and the team can be a source of better ideas. Those who study change (and its impact) suggest that your team members have differing technology adoption lifestyles. Before you proceed, you need to know which of the following categories your various team members belong to:

- Innovators aggressively pursue new technology. They love it.
- Early Adopters have early buy-in and are able to picture benefits to the organization.
- Early Majority team members are more pragmatic; they focus on personal benefits.
- Late Majority people will accept new technology only when forced to.
- Laggards do not and will not accept new technology.

This is an opportunity to help your clients become better adopters of technology. That, in turn, will make them better able to compete in today's environment. And the quicker you can help get them there, the more successful you can be. Here are some other points to keep in mind:

- Resistance to technology change is based in emotion. If you try to talk someone out of their feelings, they tend to dig in their heels.
- Encourage team members to express any concerns along the way.
- Do not take personally the resistance people are showing.
- Resistance can often be overcome by improved communication.
- Be sure everyone feels that they are in it together. There is strength in camaraderie.
- Celebrate wins along the way, not just at the end.
- Keep your sense of humor through it all.

The second time was the charm for Danny, and ABC Distributing is benefiting. Business is up. Stress is down. Technology did indeed strengthen its performance. With apologies to the author who is unknown, this quote pretty well sums it up: "Once a new technology rolls over you, if you're not part of

the steamroller, you're part of the road." Help your clients be proactive and successful in an ever-changing technology world, and you will continue to be their hero.

Technology + People = Success. Good luck! ☐

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Technology • Article

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