

Good people yield efficient use of technology

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There's no question about it. Technology has the power to facilitate communication and drive sales.

It can increase revenue and broaden your marketplace. Properly used, it can maximize your employees' productivity, and bring your company's projects in under budget and ahead of schedule.

Unfortunately, there is a flip side.

When technology solutions for the workplace are not carefully thought out and implemented, they can frustrate and discourage your staff, leaving thousands of dollars of technopower either under-utilized, or completely abandoned.

Incompatibilities. Problems with connectivity. Sketchy tech support. User error. These are only a few of the things that can thwart the effectiveness of a technology solution in your workplace.

To bring about maximum efficiency, think about leveraging technology in three important areas: hardware, software and peopleware.

Most people are familiar with two of these three areas: software and hardware. Item No. 3, however, is the glue that holds the entire solution together, and is very often either overlooked or undervalued: peopleware.

Software

Pre-packaged or custom-built,

these are the programs that power your solutions.

Hardware

The equipment that runs the software that powers the solutions

Peopleware

Managing the software and hardware like the Wizard of Oz behind the curtain in the scene from the famous movie are people. No matter which hardware and software vendors you choose, technology is ultimately driven by human beings.

No matter how sophisticated your solution is, at the end of the day, you will continue to rely on people to leverage the investment you have

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Curriculum vitae

Trenton Hightower is the associate vice president of FCC/JTA customized training at Frederick Community College. In addition, he has completed "Train the Trainer" courses in the following areas: Using the Malcolm Baldrige by Kodak, Dale Carnegie sales course, Xerox strategic planning process, systems curriculum and instructional development by OSU (certified), Ziglar Education Systems, and DDI certification. Mr. Hightower has a bachelor's in communication and public relations and a master's in administration of higher education.

Hightower: People and technology

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made in technology.

Time after time, companies purchase powerful technological solutions, focusing on only the software package, and the hardware needed to run them.

Peopleware — that all important knowledge needed to leverage the solution effectively — is almost completely ignored.

The result?

A frustrated workforce who cannot share information, collect data, gather files or communicate effectively with one another.

And a frustrated owner or manager who must account for a line item in the budget with a very poor return on investment.

What's a company to do?

■ Do a Needs Assessment to

determine a year hardware transition plan for updating new equipment. Because technology changes so rapidly, it is difficult to see more than 2 years ahead.

■ If you choose to have a software solution specially designed for you, be aware of the tendency to "over build." Off-the-shelf or custom-built, most companies use less than 50% of the functionality a software package offers. Always remember the end user. Software not only needs to be effective, it has to be intuitive and easy to use. Keep it basic.

■ To get the most out of the hardware and software, we're back to where we started — peopleware.

Start by figuring out what you know, and what you don't

know. Do a needs assessment to determine where your staff's strengths are, as well as where the gaps and weaknesses are.

From there, you can build your training program for best results.

■ This training will show a quick return on your investment if you customize their training program to their specific needs. Employ six-hour training sessions and 2-4 hour refreshers to bring your "peopleware" up to par.

Using a pre-test and a post-test will measure outcomes.

Give your staff the training they need, and the combination of the right hardware, software and peopleware will take your business far.