

PEOPLE FIRST. TECHNOLOGY SECOND.

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Technology can be your friend or foe depending on how you define it and ultimately use it. Think about technology as if it were a person. Technology is only as good as those who use it. Why, then, would you implement technology if you don't implement a game plan for change and process enhancement within your company?

Using technology to help find, capture, maintain and support customers is imperative; however, to implement technology for the sake of just having technology available isn't the right approach. Technology solutions need human input. Technology can't be built or utilized to its fullest potential if you don't involve the human element. So, why not involve that human element into the build and strategy of the technology solution instead of forcing it onto the situation and person(s) at hand?

Most off-the-shelf technology tends to demand a high level of change due to its lack of customization. This takes a company's employees from one comfort zone to the unknown overnight. As a result, you have "told" the employees how to work best according to their perceived strengths and weaknesses instead of allowing them to have input into what would help them be more productive and inspired to do their best.

In the other corner, we have customized technology to fit specific needs, demands, expectations, objectives, and personality and productivity traits in a company. By customizing a technology solution, you tend to spend a lot of time, resources and money on implementing and deploying the solution; however, in the long run you avoid some of the negative reactions to "change." This is true as long as you involve those employees involved in utilizing the technology. And, when you implement new technology don't forget to make sure it is intuitive enough for the target audience's specific needs and use.

In marketing, the customer comes first (or should). You wouldn't spend thousands of dollars on a marketing campaign without knowing who you are targeting and what challenges and needs they have, would you? So, why implement a technology solution without learning about the target audience(s) inside and outside your company who use and experience it?

When researching and considering a software package think about:

1. Who will be using the technology and to what capacity?
2. When is the last time you asked users what they thought of the current solution? In addition, if they had a wish list to make the solution more efficient and effective in helping their productivity, what would those wishes be? Finding out this information can help build internal acceptance and ownership in the new technology, making the element of change more palatable.
3. Does the new technology have the ability to grow economically and efficiently with the organization and user needs? In other words, is it modular in structure or an all-in-one total package – use what you need, leave what you don't?
4. Are the users completely unhappy with the technology currently used? Or, do they find the process in which the technology is used to support the team/company weak, nonproductive and obsolete? (Perhaps the company can enhance the technology and the process by which it is utilized instead of introducing a completely new solution.)
5. Based on the needed functionality and features, is it more strategic and cost effective to invest in the entire solution at once, or is the technology modular? Can the technology solution grow with the business? Is it flexible enough to adapt to change and business evolution?

6. If you are changing a technology solution in one team/division within the company, how will that affect the connectivity and integration into other technology counterparts? Will extra system integration and application bridging need to take place? (This may increase costs beyond just the purchase of the solution.)
7. Have you set the stage for internal change? When implementing a new technology solution, forewarn and prepare the team, division and/or company of what is happening, when it will be deployed and why it is necessary. Springing new technology, along with new processes, onto employees is a sure-fire way of increasing levels of frustration, disappointment and reluctance toward change. Ultimately this will communicate itself to outside audiences – possibly giving the company a negative image to its customers/business partners.

Perhaps we have allowed technology to be our safety blanket for how we treat and interact with our employees and customers. In many ways we have made the technology gadgets, tools and even buzzwords override the daily needs of those who make the technology live and breathe. It may be time to step back and think about the human element to your technology solution so you get the return you expect – not just from the technology but also the people using it.

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