

Technology – The People Factor

By Ruth Laroche

New technology can be a challenge when introduced into an organization. Some people accept it eagerly while others are non-committal or skeptical. Still others are “nay-sayers”.

Although technology should make the job easier, many workers still struggle with floods of e-mails and voice mails. Most people work with traditional phones and computers but, add a pager, one or two cell phones and a laptop computer, and is it any wonder staff feel overwhelmed and are less than enthusiastic about embracing new technology?

While there are no easy or simple solutions, it’s possible to relieve the pressure and stress of implementing new technology in the workplace.

Provide Training

Staff need to understand new technology and how to use it effectively. For example, they probably know how to create and send e-mail and how to use voice mail but do they know how to program their phones, how to pick up messages off-site, how to remotely change greetings or how to forward calls? They need to understand ‘beyond the basics’. Consider offering a refresher course or advanced training.

Clarify Processes

New technology usually means replacing existing routines with new ones. However, as with e-mail and voice mail, old and new processes often interface and must work in tandem. Help staff understand those processes, what happens in the various stages and how those processes interact with existing means of communication. In addition, provide opportunities to practise using new technologies.

Develop Good Work Habits

The most difficult challenge people face is changing or adjusting work habits to accommodate new technologies. Basic principles governing good work habits – workload planning and organizing – remain critical for smooth, effective and efficient workflow.

For example, many e-mails and voice mails are short, often informal and virtually instantaneous so workers tend to overlook preparation. They impulsively dial a number or type an e-mail, often getting less-than-effective results.

Preparation is Important

Quite simply, the sender has the upper hand in shaping the result or reply. Many e-mail and voice mail messages start a “thread” of back-and-forth dialogue. Individually, they may seem inconsequential, only taking one or two seconds to deal with. But when tallied, they eat up “chunks” of valuable time and add to the volume of incoming mail. Prepare the message by putting yourself on the receiving end. What would you need to know? Pause and think, then plan your message using the following questions:

- What is my topic?
- Who is the receiver?
- What is the purpose of the message?
- What does this person already know?
- What questions or reaction will I get?
- What is my message?
- What actions do I want/need?

Answers should determine the content of messages and the most effective means of communication whether it is by phone call, voice mail or e-mail. Clear messages reduce workloads and stress and lead to a more productive and relaxed staff.

Staff is more apt to embrace new technology when each has been trained to use it appropriately and when each understands the processes involved and can apply good work habits. Remember the people factor!!

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