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a newsletter on practical strategic thinking and action
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editor's message

We coined this phrase recently while working on a new business process and software implementation project with one of our clients. Telling someone to be lazy at work catches their attention. It turned out to be a good tagline for our project and could be one for you.

In Strategic Thinking, we'll explain what we mean by the phrase; and in Strategic Action, we'll give you some ideas on how to be creatively lazy. This month's Industry Spotlight shares new examples of visual presentations, and the Reading List reviews *The Economic Naturalist*.

strategic thinking

Efficiency Lessons from My Mother

My mother could have been a process consultant rather than a housewife and real estate investor. She has a system for everything. Her kitchen was laid out for a minimum number of steps. She constantly questioned herself and her family as to why we were doing something a certain way...and often had an opinion about the strength of our logic. Her questioning taught me to think about what I do and how to set up systems that save me work in the long run.

I thought of my mother recently when we were working to help a client improve their business processes, including the implementation of new software. When you are going through a project like that, there are lots of new details that crop up as you get deeper into the project. One day, in response to a request to add some information to a standard report in the new system, some of the staff were ready to create a work-around to put the requested data into a data field they weren't using. But the open field was intended for something else. This work around was going to create confusion and inefficiency in the long run. We had to invest some time to find a place where that data already existed in the system and get it into the standard report. Investing the time up front meant that no one had to re-enter this data day after day, week after week, month after month into the future.

I pulled the phrase out of the air that day. I told them that we needed to think about how to be "creatively lazy." The phrase sounded funny and caught their attention. Being creatively lazy actually takes more work up front but saves much more work over the long run. That's actually a really good thing for any company.

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Lazy is an unexpected but valid way of saying that no one should be put in a position of doing repetitive, illogical work if there is a simpler and more efficient way to do it. Read on for some ideas on how to accomplish this.

-Mary Adams (adams@trekconsulting.com)

strategic action

Saving Time and Money

When implementing this concept of “creative laziness”, you must first recognize a situation that calls for improvement. Look at it this way, it’s like holding or selling a stock. You ask yourself, “At today’s price, would I buy this stock?” If the answer is no, then maybe it’s time to sell. The same thing applies to your investment of time in your work.

Are there work processes you use every day that are repetitive, labor-intensive or creating recurring problems? Ask yourself, “If I were setting this up today, would I set it up this way?” There are many reasons to reassess the situation. For one thing, technologies may have changed since the initial implementation, and it could be possible to improve the process in ways unavailable before. Or you may have better or different people in place with advanced skills that will allow you to create more efficient processes.

This approach could apply to any process within your organization: sales, internal communications, raw materials procurement, deliveries, or manufacturing. Instead of just applying a “band-aid” approach to a poor or broken process, take a step back instead. Apply fresh perspective and ask how each aspect of the process could be restructured so it is easier to accomplish but more effective than the current approach.

One way to begin this is to look at your desired output or result and engineer the process backward from there. What is it you want to achieve? What components are required? Who are the right people? What should the output look like when it’s done? What steps do you need to get there, regardless of who currently does them? An investment in some fresh thinking today can save you a lot of time and money tomorrow—all by being creatively lazy.

- Michael Oleksak (oleksak@trekconsulting.com)

industry snapshot

Something More Than Bullets

Ever since we read Made to Stick (<http://www.trekconsulting.com/Publications/Newsletter/Issue35/Issue35.html>), we have been reading the authors’ blog (<http://www.trekconsulting.com/Blog/>)



madetostick.com/blog/). They pointed their readers to a presentation contest sponsored by a slide sharing website (<http://www.slideshare.net/contests/contest-details>) with the caveat that they thought the winners were beautiful but probably not necessarily “sticky” or memorable.

Nevertheless, for those of us that are struggling to leave something behind other than bulleted lists as a form of communication, these presentations are thought-provoking and inspiring. We first were turned on to the idea of using stock photo sites (istock.com being the one we use the most) some time ago by a consultant who specializes in presentation communication. His advice (<http://www.trekconsulting.com/Publications/Newsletter/Issue23/Issue23.html#snapshot>) is as salient as ever and meets the standards set by the Heaths: Tell a good story and use pictures on your slides to connect with the reader.

reading list

The Economic Naturalist: In Search of Explanations for Everyday Enigmas

By Robert Frank

This month’s book review takes a similar approach to our Strategic Thinking and Strategic Action pieces. The author, Robert Frank, is an Economics professor at Cornell. He takes questions from his students about apparently contradictory situations and curiosities and offers explanations based on economics, keen observations and common sense. Frank says he prefers this type of analysis to the boring charts and graphs and formulas that alienate so many first- and second-year economics students in college.

Some of the situations are humorous (“Why do women endure the discomfort of high heels?” and “Why do baseball managers wear uniforms?”). Many are revealing (“Why are minibar prices so exorbitant?”) and others more serious, (“Why is the employment rate so much higher in Germany than in the U.S.?”) There are well over a hundred situations examined, and each is compelling. It’s a good read that encourages analysis and an open mind.

Here are the short versions of the answers, but without Frank’s insights:

- High heels make women seem taller and exaggerate the female form.
- In the early days, many managers were also players.
- High priced minibars help offset competitive room rates.
- Germany has better unemployment benefits, meaning the unemployed can be more patient in finding the right job.

More fun questions are on the author’s website.



announcements

Mary Adams' presentation at ConsultingWorld last month was a big success. Her message about the growing, but often unrecognized, importance of intangibles to the future success of American corporations resonated with many in the audience and led to a lot of interesting conversations with consultants from around the world. If you are curious about the presentation, you can download a copy of the handout.

about trek consulting

Trek Consulting LLC helps companies to face the challenges of growth, building value and dealing with change. Since 1999, we have been a valued partner to business owners and leaders on their arduous journey to business success. We know that we cannot make this journey for our clients, but we can make it easier and more successful. We focus on getting you the best information available, facilitating sound planning and decision-making, making sure you have the right skills and resources to face your challenge, and coaching you through the roadblocks that invariably arise along the way.

Our clients report improved market focus, greater revenues, better margins and increased profits. To learn more about Trek Consulting and how we can help you improve your company's results, visit us on the web at www.trekconsulting.com or call us at 781-729-1008.