LESSONS LEARNED I BY GERSON ROSENBLOOM

The Danger of Technology

I'm a tech junkie. I love my smartphone and tablet. I've always been an early adopter. You can be sure that I've got the latest operating system on my laptop and all the newest apps. I even like egghead things like really painstakingly detailed file hierarchies and totally tripped out spreadsheets.

Thanks to all this technology, I have the wherewithal to remain connected in any number of ways, from anywhere on the planet, with a remarkable palette of possible tasks that I can perform at the flip of a button.

But here's the thing: There's a dark side to all this technology and many of us get seduced by it. If I'm totally honest with myself, looking back on my company, I'm sure that there were times when I spent hours working on technology instead of working on my business. In my mind, I'm sure that I thought the two were equivalent. But it's not always so.

THE HUMAN TOUCH

A focus on technology is good, but don't lose sight of the impact of human interaction

Back in the days before all the common carriers provided software to create shipping labels, I thought it would be a great time-saver to create templates to fill out their blank forms. It felt like a great accomplishment once I had it done, but it's unlikely that all the time invested in the project ever really increased productivity. It became an excuse for not doing the real work that needed to be done. What technology projects have you or your staff undertaken that have turned into "time sucks?" There's little that you can imagine today that isn't available somewhere for some modest sum of money. Spending a couple bucks on turnkey versions of the things you need will free you up to do much more valuable things in your business — like paying attention to the day-to-day activities and challenges.

Another really popular way of wasting time is social media. Now don't get all worked up! The various social media, as well as email and text blasts, should all be part of your approach to outreach. It's important to reach your customers through the electronic media. But if you become entirely dependent on them, you're missing a lot. Think about it — how much feedback do you actually get from these efforts? Now think about picking up the telephone and contacting former customers. One or two minutes on the phone can be a treasure trove of good information. What about actually meeting face-to-face with customers in your store? This is invaluable. But if you're hurrying through a conversation in the store to get back to the virtual interactions on your laptop, you are short-circuiting your greatest source of relationship-building potential.

The reality of electronic communication is that it tends to be very cut and dry. That's actually part of the reason that we gravitate to it. It's really simple — you ask a direct question and you get a direct answer. Or your customer presents a problem, and you send back an email response that offers a solution. In your mind, it's "mission accomplished." But what you miss is the nuance of a personal conversation. You miss the intonation when a customer writes "thanks for handling it," but actually means, "I'm glad you're doing something, but I'll never shop there again." In a real-time conversation you'd pick up the distinction, in email you may lose a customer forever.

You need to be sure that you have a sound technology game plan for your business. But then, with that in place, be certain to never let it become a layer that separates you from your customers or your co-workers. **MI**

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