
WHAT'S IMPORTANT | Volume V, Issue 3 | June 24, 2009

"What's Important" is a universal concern. The phrase resonates with an infinite number of meanings. What's important is both a question and an answer, depending on the situation.

"Change is hard because people overestimate the value of what they have - and underestimate the value of what they may gain by giving that up."

~ James Belasco and Ralph Stayer, Flight of the Buffalo (1994)

As business leaders, we face this difficulty all the time, either in the form of change we try to encourage others to embrace, or change we ourselves would rather not make. It is human nature to embrace the comfortable, even if the comfortable has outlived its usefulness.

The Qwerty keyboard is a prime example. With its name derived from the six letters on its upper left row, the Qwerty keyboard was invented in 1872 to fix a particular problem. The keys and arms on typewriters jammed when typists were too quick. The solution: arrange the keys in an inefficient way to intentionally slow down the typists.

Today, the Qwerty is ubiquitous, nearly 140 years and a multitude of life-changing, efficiency-enhancing technological advances later.

Why? It's comfortable. Typewriters have gone the way of the dinosaur, yet tiny Qwerty keyboards show up on iPhones and Blackberries not because they are efficient, but because they are familiar.

The idiom, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it," might apply here. Sometimes we need small comforts to help us navigate change. And other times, in waiting until something is broken, we miss out on opportunities to pursue proactive innovation and enhance efficiency.

What about the other "Qwertys" at work? What if the traditional Monday morning executive team meeting became a Thursday brainstorming lunch? What if, after keeping functions like IT and payroll in house for decades, we outsource them? What if even though "we've always run our own custom software on our own servers," shifting to an SAAS (software as a service) could improve efficiency and reduce expense?

We may not be able to change the Qwerty keyboard, but we can make a difference in the other little Qwertys in our business and our life.

What's important is to not let "the way we've always done it" stand in the way of something better.

Email me at chuck@durakis.com to share your thoughts.

Thanks,

Chuck