Chapter 11 - Technology

Managers are constantly challenged to find new ways to increase sales/participation while controlling and reducing costs. Timely information is essential to the process. Managers typically turn to *technology* to obtain that information.

Technological innovation, at its best, will make your lives easier and improve your productivity. At its worst, however, it will add even more things to your "To Do" list, and create frequent frustration…and occasional havoc for you and your operation. Technology can become an end in itself, rather than a means to an end. So let's start with some of the caveats for an age of technological innovation.

Remember your goals.

Don't fall in love with the latest and greatest technological innovation just because it seems "cool." Perhaps that new music system can provide one million recorded songs, sorted by musical style, available at the touch of a button for your customers. WOW! But does that purchase support the goals you set for your activity, like the environment you want to create for your customers?

Avoid technophobia.

Many people are intimidated by the latest technology. For these people, the electronics super store can be a frustrating experience. But a computerized system for keeping track of library books doesn't have to be any scarier than the old card catalogs. Different, yes, but don't let the world pass you by. The unknown can be scary. Read, take classes, explore online information and don't be afraid to ask questions to keep up with the latest trends.

Garbage In, Garbage Out! (GIGO)

Computers are exceptionally good at processing enormous quantities of data, using elaborate computation schemes at an incredible rate of speed. But if you feed them inaccurate information, they will proudly spit out incorrect answers…to as many decimal points as you like.

Computers are very *precise.* They can provide very detailed answers, following computation instructions perfectly. However, they are not necessarily *accurate.* A computer will give you a very precise wrong answer if you give it the wrong information or the wrong instructions.

Beware of getting behind.

Somebody has to facilitate the input job--getting information into the system, before it can do any processing. If you depend on the output to make management decisions, you need that information in a timely manner. But if you get behind in data entry, your computer might as well be on vacation. It can't provide output until you give it the required input. And the situation is made worse if you depend on the computer and don't study the information until you receive the output.

Consider Return on Investment (ROI).

Perhaps that new computerized point-of-sale system will save you hundreds of dollars every week in the Pro Shop, but it costs over ten thousand dollars to purchase and install, and you will have to train a higher-paid employee to operate it. How long will it take to pay off your investment?

Once again, you have to consider your goals. Only you and your leadership can determine ROI; because within MWR, more than just the financial bottom line is considered. Sometimes customer convenience and quality of life factor in. Do not make the purchase without considering all those factors.

Plan for Obsolescence.

You've heard of "planned obsolescence," in which a manufacturer purposefully changes a product solely to make the one you currently have out of date. Automobiles, for example, change every year…whether there is any apparent innovation or not, but *unplanned* obsolescence is lurking out there, especially with technology products. Part of your capital improvement plan will be replacing outdated technology.

Remember to *backup* constantly!

Computers assist you in managing huge quantities of data, but they are not foolproof; they sometimes *crash!* If you haven't regularly backed up all of your data, you may find yourself with serious problems. For example, it would be annoying if you wrote a letter and failed to back it up before your computer crashed. You'd have to write the letter again, from the beginning. But what if your computer holds all of your accounts receivable? If they aren't backed up, you may not be able to collect. Don't just hit "save." Have--and consistently use--a meticulous backup plan.

Always have a "Plan B."

Any time you replace your computer (or fitness machine, or steam jacketed kettle, or automobile, etc.), experts recommend keeping the old machine until you know that the new one is going to meet your needs. "The computer is down," is one of the most irritating things listed by customers in a recent survey. They really don't care that your computer is down; they just want to use your facilities. What if you have a power outage? What if your fancy new machine breaks down? You should always have a manual backup system.

So why should I bother with automation?

Maybe before pointing out the warnings, we should have provided the benefits! It's the old "good news/bad news" conundrum.

Every MWR/Services activity collects and analyzes data. You need financial information, marketing information, customer information, employee information…there's no escaping the need for data. Unless you're a very small activity with few customers, it is easier and faster to collect and analyze that data by using one of many computer systems now available.

Automated processing improves customer service. For example, a POS system in a club allows

the wait staff to remain on the floor serving customers, rather than hand-delivering tickets to the kitchen. The POS system also provides an accurate check for item pricing and totals, and speeds the payment process.

Consider your computer a tool, capable of processing large amounts of data more quickly than you ever could manually. If you use this tool correctly, it will provide timely information to help you make management decisions.

Automated processes may also save in labor costs. There is a trend toward self-service checkout in many operations today. This reduces the need for cashiers (although it may increase the need for technical service experts). Bar codes or new radio technology may improve your inventory procedures. Computerized accounting may give you more detailed reports, faster, with fewer errors.

Summary Chapter 11

Technological change is increasing at an increasing pace. To manage technology, certain caveats are important:

- Remember your goals.

- Avoid technophobia.

- Garbage In, Garbage Out! (GIGO)

- Beware of getting behind.

- Consider Return on Investment. (ROI)

- Plan for obsolescence.

- Remember to *backup* constantly!

- Always have a "Plan B."

Be aware of these caveats, but know that technology is not a four-letter word! The pace of technological innovation is increasing at a breathtaking rate, and the products and procedures that technology provides will be used by savvy managers to improve their operations, thus improving the quality of life for MWR/Services patrons around the globe.