

“ Is this fear of technology limiting our business success? ”



NO. 10: TECHNOPHOBIA—THE HIDDEN DISEASE

Editor's Note: *Following is the last in our ten-part series, called "Accounting Software Checkup: Ten Ailments That Can Hinder a Healthy Bottom Line," by our regular columnist, Fred Ode. Each "ailment" is discussed in detail to help you determine if your seemingly healthy business has an underlying problem. Go to www.constructionbusinessowner.com to read the entire series.*

It's not contagious. It's not painful. And thankfully, it's not life threatening. *Technophobia* is, however, a very real ailment that can undermine a contractor's plan for growth and prosperity.

In this ten-part series, contractors were asked to look at their current accounting software for "symptoms" of fatigue or signs that their current program is no longer meeting their needs. The previous article, "Stop End-User Rejection Before It Grows," (*Construction Business Owner*, October 2008) mainly focused on how to identify software limitations. In contrast, this final article addresses not only software, but also the "peo-

ple factor" of software use.

Technophobia (defined as a fear of or aversion to advanced technology) is prevalent in the construction world where many contractors openly joke that their entire staff will quit if a new accounting program is even mentioned. But joking aside, to meet both current and long-term business challenges, contractors need to ask the serious question: Is this fear of technology limiting our business success?

Technophobia begins innocently enough and can include any of the following symptoms:

- ▶ Resistance to changing the processes needed to implement a new technology

- ▶ Loyalty to the current technology, even when it's causing obvious problems
- ▶ And (in its severest form), refusal to use and learn a new technology

Digging deeper, many of these symptoms result from some common behavioral issues. Feelings of discomfort, fear of change and a perceived loss of control are all natural reactions to new technology. And they can strike an organization at any level—from president to accounting staff. With a little communication, planning and understanding, however, even the severest of the technophobes can be transformed. But first,

it's important to understand why technophobia is so prevalent among construction companies today.

The "It's Worked for Years" Factor

Many companies have a system in place (and it's the way things have always been done). But times have a way of changing, and hanging onto this status-quo mentality could hinder the company's long-term growth.

When it comes to accounting software, complacency can be avoided when users are willing to ask, "Can this be done in a better/more cost-effective/more efficient way?" For example, a contractor who reenters accounting data into spreadsheets for job costing and billings decides to investigate alternatives. When the contractor discovers that construction-specific software will instantaneously produce these same reports in a fraction of the time they currently spend, the "it's worked for years" mentality quickly loses its appeal.

The Fear Factor

Fear of change is a very real emotion. When outcomes are unknown, people become uncomfortable, their anxiety builds and resistance takes hold. For a large part of the population, new technologies represent a drastic change unlike anything they have ever experienced.

Why aren't more contractors adopting construction-specific technologies today (despite the fact that they are less expensive and more readily available)? The answer lies in the fear of change. In fact, many times the success of a software implementation is dependent on the program users' acceptance.

Since fear of change translates

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to fear of the unknown, the key to breaking down resistance is communication. When employees are provided with information on why the change is necessary, what to expect during the process and how the change will help them professionally, they are more likely to support it.

The Loyalty Factor

Letting go of outdated or accounting software is an industry-wide problem for contractors of all sizes. Why? Because many construction company bookkeepers, office managers and even owners are loyal—to a fault—to their original bookkeeping software. Sure, it may not do everything they want, and it may require extra work to get things done, but they realize this. Like a best friend with whom they've had both good times and bad, this system has kept them comfortable and secure.

These technophobes make excuses for the software's weaknesses. They ignore or simply don't fully understand that there may be a better way. To overcome the loyalty factor, experts recommend that companies involve all users in the planning and recommendation phase of a software search. This allows users to see the advantages firsthand and have a voice in which software will become their next "best friend."

Equally important in overcoming the loyalty factor is training. Mak-

ing certain that users receive proper training—even if it takes a bit longer to go live on a new system—eliminates a staffer's urge to turn back to the old, familiar system.

As technology continues to change the face of construction today, technophobia itself is perhaps the thing to fear most. The final accounting software checkup calls for contractors to take stock of their users and determine where they stand in terms of new software acceptance. Even the best laid plans and a chosen software product is no match for the greatest obstacle of all: fear of change. ■



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