



## Building a Technology Friendly Workplace

### Learning Outcomes

**By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:**

- 📌 Make your workplace a technology-friendly place
- 📌 Make the most of computers, telephones, instant messaging, e-mail, contact management applications, and scheduling software
- 📌 Communicate better with the IT department

## Building a Technology Friendly Workplace

### Tips and Tricks

#### Tips for the Workplace

The key to creating a technology-friendly workplace is open-mindedness. Technology is evolving at an ever-rapid pace and it is necessary to be able to consider alternatives even if you're not a person who can easily adapt to change.

The first step to making your workplace a technology-friendly one is to include employees in the process. Have a meeting to talk about technology and discuss:

- Ñ What do you use technology for?
- Ñ What is frustrating?
- Ñ What is helpful?
- Ñ What would you like to use technology for?

#### Tips for Employees

As well, make sure employees have adequate resources.

- Ñ If possible, set up a computer or two in the break room that employees can use for personal or experimentation purposes.
- Ñ Have a library of computer books that employees can take out and read.
- Ñ If a library isn't possible, offer a list of free websites that employees can go to for help.
- Ñ Let employees know where they can get training, whether it be in-house or at the local community college. Where possible, offer incentives (such as paid time off or subsidized training) for employees to enhance their knowledge.

To go a step further, try these tips.

- Ñ Have in-house experts that staff can go to. (Make sure that this person can still do their job duties.)
- Ñ Have a suggestion box for employees to submit questions, concerns, or training tips.
- Ñ Involve employees in software purchases. For example, if you're purchasing a new accounting package, speak to your accounting department. They will be more open to using the new software if they feel that they had a hand in the decision to buy it.

#### Tips for Managers

If you're a manager, it's even more important to stay open-minded.

- Ñ Lead by example. Use the devices that you're comfortable with and be open to new ideas.

- Ñ Be sensible in your standards. While you can't have all of your employees using different word processing programs, if Bob feels better hand-delivering a memo to you rather than e-mailing it, why not let him?
- Ñ Talk to employees about technology. Let's say your bookkeeper absolutely refuses to use the accounting package you purchased. Talk to him and find out why this is. Maybe the employee just isn't comfortable with the program, maybe they're afraid, or maybe they need training.
- Ñ Remember that technology doesn't have to be used for everything. For example, some beauty salons use computers to book appointments, while others just use a paper calendar. It all depends on what your needs are, what your budget is, and what the comfort level of yourself and your staff is.
- Ñ Ensure that purchases are made intelligently. If you have children, you know that if one child gets an iPod, they all want an iPod. You don't want to invest in technology for employees just so they have the latest and greatest; you want your purchases to change the employee's job in some way.

### **Ten Easy Ways to Use Technology to Make Work Fun**

1. Send employees online articles or newsletters about their field or technology. (Hint: Woody's Office Watch, David Pogue's column in the New York Times, and Windows Secrets are fantastic resources.)
2. Find free webinars and encourage staff to attend.
3. Have a staff meeting where everyone brings or shows their favorite gadget (not necessarily work related).
4. Add animations, movies, sounds, schemes, voiceovers, and effects to PowerPoint presentations. Just make sure it doesn't detract from the message.
5. Set aside five minutes during the day for a team Minesweeper or Solitaire contest. Prizes to the winner!
6. Have your meeting outside... it's possible with laptops!
7. Have a staff meeting to compile a list of the top ten ways technology can ruin your day. This can then act as an off-the-cuff needs assessment. (For example, let's say that everyone agrees that waiting ten minutes for their e-mail to open puts them in a bad mood. This can be a clue to you that systems may need an upgrade.)
8. Remember how much fun extracurricular activities were in grade school? Set up a club for online gaming (off work time of course!).
9. Turn an unused PC into a Friday afternoon jukebox. Everyone in the department gets to add a certain number of tracks to the list... and then put it on random!
10. Set up an internal-only blog or forum where everyone can vent on random topics... the weather, the current state of zebras, and the deplorable condition of orange juice these days. Just make sure conversation stays civil and posting is done on breaks.

## Acme Consulting, Part One

### Scenario One

#### Background Information

Fifty-two-year-old Tom Pipes runs a plumbing business that has been in the family for decades. He often gets last-minute calls, so he uses a small appointment book to track where he needs to be and when. He does have major projects to complete (like the plumbing for the new school), but since his staff is small, he finds it easy to get everything done on time, even if everyone has to pitch in a few extra hours. His wife, Martha, is convinced that he needs to join the 21<sup>st</sup> century and invest in some computer software. She thinks Tom needs a better way of managing his time and resources, and that a computer with scheduling software would be a good tool. Tom doesn't have a computer in office or in his home, and is reluctant to make the investment.

**What solutions would you propose for Tom?**

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**What reasons would you give him and Martha?**

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### Scenario Two

#### Background Information

Mark Monson owns and runs a small advertising firm. His staff of six has struggled long and hard through the first few years of business. Now that they're turning a profit, he has treated them all to new computer systems and software that can make designing ads a lot easier. After this huge investment, he's noticed production is down and employees aren't using the new tools. He's come to Acme Consulting for some help.

**Why might staff not be using the new tools?**

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**What can Mark do to help them?**

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**What could Mark have done to make the process smoother?**

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**Scenario Three**

**Background Information**

The CEO of Acme Consulting has entrusted your team with a top-secret project. She is looking into purchasing mobile tools such as smartphones and tablets for the consulting staff. She has a lot of information but she's not sure she's ready to make the decision. She's asked your team to make sure she's covered all the bases.

**What information would you make sure the CEO had obtained?**

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**How should the CEO share this project with staff members?**

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**What can the CEO do to make sure the tools are used properly?**

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**Scenario Four**

**Background Information**

For three months, Lisa Leeds has been looking for a manager to oversee her company's production floor. She's finally found the right person, but he has no computer skills, which she feels are essential to the job. She's asked Acme Consulting for their input on the problem.

**What would be your basic message to Lisa: hire the person or keep looking?**

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**What compromises can both Lisa and the potential staff member make?**

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**If they choose to hire this employee, how can the company make his transition easier?**

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## Conquering Computers

### Setting Expectations

Computers are the biggest aspect of technology and can be the most difficult to manage. First and foremost, take care of the employee.

- Ñ Make sure employees have adequate training and resources.
- Ñ Make sure employees know what is expected of them and where the limits are. It may be useful to set up a computer usage policy and have everyone read and sign it. (We'll discuss this in more detail later on in the workshop.)
- Ñ Make sure employees know where to get help.
- Ñ Mistakes will happen and things will break. Treat accidents as accidents and learn from the experience.

### Upgrading Software

Another issue is software upgrades. When you make the decision to upgrade software in particular, you must take into account the time and money that will be spent training staff and the productivity lost while they learn the software. Depending on the scope of the upgrade, this can translate into many dollars and hours lost. It is absolutely essential that employees receive some form of training whenever new software is introduced. (We will discuss training and upgrades in more detail later on in the workshop.)

Imagine that someone handed you the keys to a brand-new Lamborghini that would do everything for you, including make you breakfast. However, you don't know how to drive a standard, so you can't even

turn the thing on. That means it's no good to you, and you may break it in the process of trying to figure it out. You'll probably also get frustrated and be less likely to try new things in the future.

**Stretch!**

Make sure that your employees stay healthy, especially if they sit at a desk for most of their day. There are software applications that you can purchase that will remind employees to get up and stretch once an hour (or another pre-set period of time). Alternatively, encourage everyone to get up once every hour and take a short break, even if it's just a walk around their cubicle. Not only does this help prevent repetitive strain injuries (such as carpal tunnel syndrome), it can prevent people zoning out and can stimulate creativity. (We'll discuss ergonomics in more detail later in this course.)

**Staying Focused**

Another common problem with computers is that they can be a distraction. To minimize this, try these steps.

- Ñ Make sure everyone knows what is acceptable, what isn't, and why.
- Ñ If possible, control application installation and website access over a network.
- Ñ Offer employees alternatives, such as a public computer in the break room or coupons to a local Internet café.
- Ñ Let employees know what they can do in their downtime: read related articles online, do training, or read related books.
- Ñ Let employees know that every single thing they do can be monitored. This is one place where it's OK to tell a little white lie! Explain that these policies are for their security, too. For example, if they log into their banking site online and do some transactions, that information can be viewed over the network. What if someone hacks into the network?

**Case Study**

Let's look at the cost of distractions. Let's say that Erin visits a gaming site and spends half an hour playing a game. Unknown to her, this site installed malicious software on her computer. Once she discovers this, she spends an hour trying to fix it. When she can't fix it, she calls the IT department. They spend another three hours trying to fix it, calling technical support in the process. Tech support gives up and asks that the machine be returned to the factory for a reformat.

Here's a breakdown of what this cost the company:

Employee	Time Spent	Wage Per Hour	Total
Erin	1/2 hour on game	\$10.00	\$5.00
	1 hour fixing	\$10.00	\$10.00

<b>IT Department</b>	3 hours fixing	\$50.00	\$150.00
	Call to tech support	\$20.00	\$20.00
			\$185.00

Add the figure of \$185 to the cost of returning the machine, the cost of service, and the productivity lost, and you have a considerable sum of money. Although this may seem like an uncommon occurrence (and it is to some extent; usually the IT department would be able to resolve the issue), let's say that the spyware didn't happen and we only lost \$5 for Erin playing the game. If we have 100 employees a week doing this, that's \$500.

### Have Fun With It!

Humorous signs around the workplace can help reinforce computer smarts and relieve tension. Some examples:

- Ñ Kicking your computer won't fix it. Calling IT at extension 55 will.
- Ñ Is the Office Assistant bugging you again? Call Extermination at extension 55, or visit the Clippy Support Group on Wednesdays at 2 p.m.

## Communicating with the IT Department

Many people have incorrect assumptions about IT staffers, including that they lack social skills, are unclean, are arrogant... the list goes on. The key to communicating with IT personnel is the same as communicating with anyone else: be respectful and treat them as people, not robots made to do your bidding.

A policy should be in place for how requests for IT help are made. Whether it's via phone, e-mail, or in person, make sure you respect the process. Also make sure you provide as much information as possible. Telling them, "My computer is broken," won't help them identify the problem or identify the problem's priority. Telling them, "I get a blue screen when my computer starts," is a lot more useful. Writing down the exact error message and/or steps that caused the problem is even better.

Make sure you respect the IT department's boundaries. Most departments request that employees not try to fix their own computers, simply because it often creates more problems. If you're not sure whether or not you're supposed to perform a task, ask!

On the other hand, be willing to learn. If the IT department is OK with you changing the ink in your printer, then learn how to do this task. Most IT staffers are willing to share their knowledge, especially if it's a simple task that can save them and you time in the future.

Try to have an understanding of how the internal IT process works. Certainly it's frustrating when you need your printer fixed NOW, you go to IT, and the staff member says they'll get to it when they can, all the while tapping away on their computer. It may not seem like they're doing anything, but a lot of IT work is done in the background. Without this background work, it's entirely possible that the entire company would grind to a halt.

Also remember that you're asking the IT person for help. Let's say that you need your e-mail password reset. This seems like a simple task to you and you get upset when it's not dealt with immediately. Think about what is involved in the process of resetting a password; the truth probably is that you have no idea how your IT person does such a thing. Give them time and space to do their job.

Remember as well that even though you're a manager, you probably don't have any direct control over the IT staff. Would you appreciate it if the IT manager stormed into your department, commandeered an employee, and demanded that they drop everything they were doing? You'd probably be upset and your employee probably would be too. If you have an issue with how IT processes are handled, or you feel your request isn't given enough priority, talk to the manager of the IT department.

## Choosing Software Wisely

### **The Three-Step Process**

Everyone loves software! However, a software investment is a big purchase. Software purchases should never be done impulsively, even if you get it at a bargain price. After all, it's not a deal if you end up paying out for technical support or training.

#### **Step One: What Do You Need?**

For the first step, you as a manager should make a list of the things you need the software package to do and things you want it to do. Then, consult with employees to find out their wants and needs. Make sure you consider future wants and needs, too. For example, if you only have a few staff right now, collaboration tools probably aren't high on the list. However, if your department or business is going to grow significantly, you may include that as a requirement.

Once everything has been considered, make a master list of wants and needs.

#### **Step Two: Evaluating the Software**

Now, choose at least three software packages that are in the general area of what you're looking for. If possible, get trials and have a few staff members test them out.

Once you've evaluated the package, write down some basic information about each.

- Ñ Why do we want to use this software?
- Ñ What is the initial investment? (Make sure you include the cost of software and the cost of installation time. Also consider any computer upgrades that will be necessary, as well as time or resources needed to set these components up.)
- Ñ What will the cost be later on? (Make sure you consider upgrades or annual fees.)
- Ñ Will we need training? How much will that cost in time and money?
- Ñ What support options are available? (We suggest talking to people who have used this software and dealt with their technical support.)
- Ñ Will this software improve my company's productivity? (In the short term, probably not, but in the long term, the benefits should be significant. Otherwise, it's not worth it.)
- Ñ Will this software grow with my company?

Then, compare the software's list of features with your list of wants and needs. Any package that doesn't cover all of your needs should be disqualified automatically.

What if none of the packages you evaluate seem right? Well, the good news is that there are thousands of different software packages out there. Determine why none of the packages suited your needs. If there's a single feature that you want and none of them seem to have, you may want to look for a product that has that feature and then see how it stacks up against your list of wants and needs. In the unlikely event that no product exists to do what you want, you'll have to consider alternatives: combining several pieces of software, paying someone to develop the software, or doing the task by hand.

### **Step Three: Making the Purchase**

Before you make the big buy, talk to your IT department. They may want to do the actual purchasing, or they may be able to get the software at a discount. If purchasing is left in your hands, get prices from at least three places: software stores, big-box stores, and many websites all sell software. A caveat about ordering from the Web: stick with names you trust.

### **About Upgrading**

Rather than purchasing a whole new software package, you can choose to upgrade your existing software. Yes, I said choose: upgrading is always a choice. Don't let anyone make you feel that you have to upgrade. In some situations, it makes more sense than others, and upgrades are usually an improvement to the software. As well, staff may require less training if they're already familiar with the software. (Even if you're just upgrading, we still suggest some training, even if it's just an hour's briefing session on what's new in the package.)

When considering an upgrade, make sure you have answers to these questions.

- Ñ How many versions am I upgrading? (For example, if you were upgrading from Message Plus 1 to Message Plus 6, you'd be upgrading 5 versions. Keep in mind that often the bigger the version leap, the bigger the learning curve.)
- Ñ What new features are added to the product?
- Ñ What features have been removed?
- Ñ What is the initial investment?
- Ñ What hardware or software (operating system and supporting applications) changes will have to be made if I upgrade?
- Ñ Are there any hidden costs?
- Ñ How do support options change? (Many companies stop supporting software when it reaches a certain age.)
- Ñ What known issues exist with this upgrade?
- Ñ On a scale of 1 to 10 (with 1 being extremely unnecessary and 10 being vital), how important is this upgrade?

**Acme Consulting, Part Two**

**Case Study**

**Tom's Situation**

The Acme Consultants have been called in to solve a thorny technological issue! Tom Tornado is going to upgrade his accounting department to a new software package. Here is a list of his wants and needs.

Needs	Wants
Ñ Sharing capabilities that support at least 10 computers	Ñ Ability to include graphs and charts
Ñ Compatible with Macdos X5	Ñ Voice commands
Ñ Interacts with Word Plus 5 or newer	Ñ Customizable interface
Ñ Ability to input accounts receivable, bills to pay, and generate invoices	Ñ Archive and file management capabilities
Ñ Budgeting tools	

He's looking at three different packages and frankly, he's pretty confused.

**Option One: Accounting Plus**

- Ñ Compatible with Macdos X3 and up
- Ñ Plugs into Word Plus 5 and up

- Ñ Sharing capabilities for up to 15 computers
- Ñ Input your accounts receivable and generate invoices
- Ñ Create charts and tables
- Ñ Free upgrades for five years!

**Option Two: Super Numbers**

- Ñ Compatible with Macdos X6 and up
- Ñ Plugs into all Super Office applications
- Ñ Customizable interface
- Ñ Supports voice commands
- Ñ Fantastic charting capabilities

**Option Three: Amazing Accounting**

- Ñ Compatible with Macdos X3 and up, Super Office 4 and up, Word Plus 3 and up, and Open Office Kappa and up
- Ñ Sharing capabilities for up to 10 users, and a server version is available that supports up to 99 users
- Ñ Budgeting, account receivable, and invoicing tools
- Ñ Graphing tools
- Ñ Command the application with voice, keyboard, or a combination
- Ñ Off-site archiving available for an additional fee

**Questions**

**What would you recommend for Tom?**

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**Why?**

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### Further Reading:

- ✓ Guerin, Lisa, J.D. *Smart Policies for Workplace Technology: Email, Blogs, Cell Phones & More*. NOLO, 2013.
- ✓ Merson, Len. *The Instant Productivity Toolkit*. Sourcebooks, Inc., 2005.