

**Woman's Business** by Francie Dalton

## That's truly frightening: Execs who fear technology

The first association committed to advancing careers for women in the field of technology is WITI (Women in Technology International; witi.org). Among the many challenges historically faced by their membership is their lack of access to senior executives to discuss innovation; their exclusion from decision making; and the extent to which they actually feel shunned by senior management.

Why do so many executives avoid technology and those employees who are immersed in it? Although numerous responses masquerade as answers to that question, all boil down to nothing more than fear.

If you're one of the techno-phobes who seem to instantly recoil from all things technical, or someone who's just trying to pull management out of their crouching position, the following should help you face those fears and overcome them.

**"I can't manage what I don't understand."** Not true. Being personally ill-equipped to assess a process about which one knows nothing isn't adequate justification for rejecting it. Use one of the following three ways to assess unfamiliar processes: Identify the leading academician in the field, and retain his/her services to review the process; tap into your networks and benchmark the process against their experience; or contact the research department of the relevant industry associations to benchmark the process

against their data. Arguably, you need only do this until satisfied that your colleagues in technology have established a track record of trustworthiness and reliability.

**"Technology never does anything on time or on budget."** Having been burned before in the form of cost overruns or missed deadlines is not adequate justification for excluding their involvement. Instead of blacklisting them, achieve consensus on the desired outcome and timeline, establishing criteria for your "bail out". If the portion of the project reliant upon technology slips from agreed upon financial and time parameters, you can then decide whether to increase resources or shut down the effort, depending upon its importance to the organization.

**"I'm held accountable for results, not for process. Getting involved in processes erodes my ability to generate results."** If you're responsible for increasing the productivity of "Z" function by "X" percent within 12 months with "D" level of investment, you needn't understand how technology can enable those results; but you'd be foolish not to ask your colleagues in technology how they can accelerate achievement of that result.

**"I'll sound stupid if I try to engage with those in technology."** The belief that one has to master tech-speak to converse meaningfully about technology simply isn't so. Don't even try to engage in tech-speak. Instead, collaborate with your

colleagues in technology to identify the outcomes and return on investment enabled by proposed technological innovations.

Executives who avoid technology imperil both innovation and its strategic applications. Consider the degree to which technology shapes overall organizational success. It enables competitive differentiation; increases daily productivity; facilitates revenue-generating or cost-reducing decisions. Whether controlling robotics, accelerating global communications, tracking critical productivity ratios, or enabling faster customer service, technology is already the very backbone of your business operation, and will most certainly be a primary determinant in the future stability of your organization. In no other operational arena is innovation more robust.

Realize that your personal discomfort and lack of confidence with technology simply will not be allowed to hold innovation hostage. Take classes. Hire a tutor. But overcome your fear of technology. Organizational futures, and therefore your career, depend on it.

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