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AS WE LIVE AND WORK



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IT DOESN'T ADD UP

During a recent business trip to Los Angeles, we encountered a large-scale computer failure that affected all of the food concessions at LAX Airport. At a concession where we attempted to purchase a salad, the cashier told us we'd have to wait for the manager who was driving in from Encino (approximately an hour's drive) in order to process our order. Not willing to wait the hour, we asked the cashier why she needed the manager. "Because he's the only one who knows how to make change".

At another concession, we were told that each order would take 10 minutes to process. "For a single customer ordering a sandwich, we can probably handle it OK", explained the manager. "But for a family ordering several meal combos", she continued, "employees can't add

the column of numbers and can't figure the tax". Someone nearby offered the manager the use of a calculator. "I'm not sure that's going to help", she said, "because I don't think the employees know how it works."

The point of these two vignettes is that despite legislation that students must graduate high school with proficiency in basic math, our minimum standards fly out the window when they enter the real world. The subtext is that we are so dependent on computers that we have trouble shifting gears when they fail to function.

That leads us to the most important takeaway from these stories: the need for "infrastructure readiness", a term used to describe the redundancies, architecture, and back-up plans that are necessary to keep a business running during unexpected interruptions.

Joe Wolke, Practice Director of IT Strategy at Forsythe Solutions Group Inc., an IT integration and consulting firm, calls *infrastructure readiness* a low-tech disaster recovery plan. "It is the essential preparedness that brings your business value", says Wolke. "It includes your staff, computer systems, corporate culture, channels of communication, and even your calculators." It is the ace in the hole that keeps you whole when Murphy's Law aggressively kicks in. And its fundamental mission is to position your business to optimize change, deal with blips, and create a more resilient and adaptable work culture.

Another way of addressing infrastructure readiness is to practice *primary prevention* - anticipating what is likely to go wrong and covering as many bases as possible. It's a lot of work, but an ounce of prevention is worth a ton of effort.

Organic growth, mergers, acquisitions, globalization, innovative products, and new markets have multiple points of impact on the delivery of goods and services. And glitches are common. As a leader, you have to be nimble and visionary to assure that the cost of this impact is factored into your business and that there is adequate backup. Says Wolke: "As businesses grow more dependent on I.T., and as I.T. systems get increasingly complex and interdependent, the need for an infrastructure that can adapt to change becomes more apparent and essential".

But the need for *infrastructure readiness* applies to daily living as well. We strongly suggest an accredited, one-semester high school course in infrastructure readiness consisting of simple medical knowledge (CPR, first aid, nutrition, exercise), basic home repairs, the daily use of technology, fundamental automobile maintenance, the essentials of how government works, learning to manage money (appreciating the value of compounding savings), and time management (because time is a valuable, non-renewable resource). Being savvy in these areas is essential in order to reduce our vulnerability and improve our life and our work.

Clearly, these are challenging times. We all need to become more visionary, more capable of seeing around corners, and more able to anticipate critical issues in an increasingly complex world. A world that requires individuals to manage themselves more effectively. Eric Hoffer, the longshoreman /philosopher, sums up our sentiments well when he writes "the leader has to be practical and realistic, yet he must talk the language of the visionary and the idealist."

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