

“Cleaning-Out that Old Toolbox”

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Have you ever visited Colonial Williamsburg in Virginia? Have you seen their exquisite furniture from dressers to card tables to chairs and cabinets? Did you know that they make those pieces in the on-site carpenter’s shop, which is open to the public? Check out their tools; they’re all hand tools and sometimes a far cry from what I use for building my sailboat. Those guys are real craftsmen!

Who are the craftsmen that can right a wrong while maintaining integrity of today’s businesses? It is my humble opinion that craftsmen are gradually being replaced by OEM tool suppliers and their technology. This tool-orientation influences what is possible and how we think about business. Ponder these three observations:

1. Albert Einstein once said that the *Perfection of Means and the Confusion of Ends seem to characterizes our age*. We are conditioned to meet every challenge with a new tool, or a better, more efficient one. This implies that if we are performing the wrong activities, we now do them in less time, with less people. Customer service is a great example; highly efficient but few clients feel their needs are met. We need to conduct Root Cause Analyses in order to create solutions that take away the source of trouble, that create synergy within existing processes, and most important of all, align with strategy! In my experience, it’s not unusual for such a solution *not* to require any new or additional tools at all.
2. None of the tools I bought made me a better carpenter (although that’s what I might have told my wife). Rather, it’s the experience of building my own boat that gave me a better understanding of what boat building is all about. I learned to use my tools as a means to an end, according to the challenges presented by the wood I was working on; think of density, grain and shape of the work piece. We need more craftsmen and women; inquisitive learners that comprehend what they’re doing instead of qualified tool operators.
3. It’s not just the result that counts. How about the *process* of producing the end-result? This touches upon issues of quality, values and ethics. The tools, technology and methodology you choose for your manufacturing process may have no direct effect on the end-product but it can be detrimental to the brand as a whole. Many organizations found out the hard-way when they went against public opinion. We need to rethink being relevant to buyers; what do they really care about?

Instead of *prescribing* HOW people must use their tools, we must *describe* WHAT organizations do and let employees surprise us with their ingenuity: understanding relationships between Cause & Effect; appreciating differences between Means and Ends and painting big picture perspectives to identify their contribution to the mission of the company! That’s what I call “*Breaking Boundaries in Training and Development!*”

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