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Are You Doing the Right Things or Doing Things Right

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"Our Age of Anxiety is, in great part, the result of trying to do today's jobs with yesterday's tools."

- Marshall McLuhan

What an exciting time we are living in. Everything is changing. Telephones are getting smaller, computers are getting faster and offices are becoming virtual. Nothing is sacred. We can send emails through our phones, edit movies on our computers and interact with others using the TV. And we all know, that all of this will be out of date in couple of years. We are not sure what the new tools would be like - but I can guarantee you that we will not be able to function without them.

You may feel that change is exaggerated. After all a phone is still a phone. While to some extent this is true, statistics portray a different picture. Between 1980 and 1995, 44 million old jobs disappeared while 73 million new jobs were created. After spending 22 years studying businesses in Texas, Donald Hicks of the University of Texas predicted that "the vast majority of employers and employment of which Texans will depend on in the year 2026 - or even 2006 - do not exist". Think about the new skills that have emerged in the training field. Instructional design for Web based courses did not exist three years ago - in fact few people even knew that the Web existed five years ago. The same is true with courseware developers, media experts, and Web masters and others. Even our trainees had to learn how to register online, develop a learning plan and measure their competency.

The impact of change is not limited to job skills, it is also changing the business model - i.e., how organizations run their businesses. One of the most significant impacts is the relationship between customers and the firm. Kevin Kelly in his book "New Rules for the New Economy" points out that "in the new network economy the separation between customers and the firm's employees often vanishes." For example, when pumping your own gas, using the ATM machine, searching and ordering books or making reservations online are you a savvy consumer or a non-paid employee? The answer of course is both, and Kevin argues that to maintain customer loyalty, organizations will have to expend more effort educating their clients.

While this sounds great for the training field, we should ask ourselves whether the tools and processes that we are presently using are adequate to address these needs. Training 10 employees on a new product is one thing - training 10,000 clients on 10 new products is totally different ball game. And regardless of how hard you try to do things right by optimizing on your existing tools, resources and processes; you may be fighting a losing battle.

To put this in context, I would like to share a story that I have heard couple years ago. Before, the invention of the refrigerator, iceboxes were used to preserve food. Many thriving businesses emerged to manufacture the ice and supply homes. Although they were well positioned to take advantage of this new invention, the "refrigerator", - after all they controlled the market - the majority underestimated the impact that the refrigerator would

have on their businesses. New, innovative ways for producing and preserving the ice were developed, and delivery routes were optimized, with little success. And, unfortunately, none of the businesses were able to make the transition. While they were working hard on perfecting their product - reaching the peak, an outsider came in and moved the entire mountain by changing the rules.

So as you slow down and ponder your goals for next year, you may want to take a moment to reflect on whether you are doing the right thing or doing things right.

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