

One Size Doesn't Fit All

Tired of getting nailed? Buying a new hammer isn't the solution.



DAN
BEAULIEU

AN E-MAIL CONTAINING this story appeared in my in-box the other day.

A Japanese company and an American company decided to have a canoe race. Both teams practiced long and hard. On the big day, the Japanese won by a mile. To learn why, a team comprising senior management of the American team was formed to investigate and recommend action. They hired a consulting company and paid them an incredible sum of money. Their conclusion: the Japanese had eight people rowing and one person steering, while the American team had eight people steering and one person rowing. They advised that too many people were steering the boat, while not enough were rowing. To prevent losing the next year, the rowing team's management structure was reorganized: four steering supervisors, three area steering superintendents and one assistant superintendent steering manager. They also implemented a new performance system that would give the one rower greater incentive to work harder. It was called the Rowing Team Quality First Program, with meetings, dinners and free pens for the rower. "We must give the rower empowerment and enrichments through this quality program," they said.

The next year, the Japanese won by two miles. Humiliated, the American management laid off the rower, halted development of a new canoe, sold the paddles and canceled all investments for new equipment. Then they distributed the money saved as bonuses to the senior executives.

When you hear a new idea, how do you respond? Do you a) figure out how to best use it; b) try to implement it immediately; c) start computing why it won't work?

Bet you answered c. My good friend Bob Tarzwell was commiserating about how, after sharing his expertise, he has a hard time getting paid. Having worked with Bob on a number of projects, I can vouch for his amazing talents. He can, for example show any fabricator how to build heavy copper boards up to 18 oz. or more. And he can show companies how to process boards with 0.002" lines widths and spacing. I have seen him do both. Bob, who is Canadian, understands that country's incentive laws when it comes to investing in R&D. Canada will reimburse companies up to \$500,000 a year, its way of encouraging companies to increase their technology levels. I have seen him go into a Canadian board shop, develop, implement and complete an R&D project, and fill out the paperwork. Bob gets no payment until the check arrives, and then he takes a percentage of that.

And still, sometimes he doesn't get paid. Usually, it goes

something like this: He first has to convince the shop owners that the offer is valid. Sounds too good to be true, they tell him. Then he does what he says he would do. In return, they tell Bob that he didn't do much, that what he demonstrated was so simple they could have figured it out themselves. Then the reimbursement check arrives and they keep it. This has occurred at least twice, and there's a case now pending.

Bob is one of those guys who can simplify very complicated things. An Wang called a genius he who can take a very complicated thing and make it simple. The rub is, if your solution to a complicated problem appears too simple, people will not want to pay for it. When Bob first relayed this unpleasant phenomenon, I didn't believe him. And he does make incredible claims. Once, as we were about to begin a sales presentation to a large company, he related how he was struck by lightning three times – in one afternoon! Eyebrows were raised, but as it turns out his story was true. (We won the contract.)

One of my claims is that I can show you how to increase your business by 10% just by intensifying sales tactics to your current customer base. I have proven this time and again, yet there are some who refuse to believe it. Remember the machine-gun salesperson in the old cartoon? The general, who is getting creamed while he fights using bows and arrows, tells his secretary, "I don't have to see any &*^%%\$% salesman, I'm busy fighting a war here."

Many try to solve problems via one-size-fits-all solutions, rather than applying what's right for the situation. A roofer can't fix a leaking toilet by re-shingling the roof, and a shop owner can't improve sales by buying a new drill and getting ISO. To pound the point home, when all you have is a hammer, all your problems look like nails. If you want to succeed, to get better, to improve sales, keep an open mind. It doesn't matter if *you* like your advertising; what matters is if your *customers* like it. What you build is immaterial – until your customer needs it. And rather than wait around until your customer discovers that he needs what you sell, find out what they want and give it to them.

Finally, shed any attitude that tries reflexively to shoot down new ideas. A list I stole somewhere details 50 great reasons why something won't work. I use it in training seminars (for a copy, e-mail me). We read the 50 reasons aloud and then we tear up the paper. We get those reasons off the table and we start with a clean slate, ready for new ideas. Try it; it works. **PCD&M**

DAN BEAULIEU is a founding partner in D.B. Management Group (dbmpcb.com). He can be reached at 207-873-0793; danbeaulieu@aol.com. His just-published book, *Printed Circuit Board Basics*, is available from UP Media Group.