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In This Issue

TechSolutions — A Company That Moves Cheese and Encourages You to Find It

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At a recent TechSolutions Weekly Team Meeting our Business Manager, Tricia Monnig, presented our staff with an opportunity to read, and then participate in a breakfast discussion on, the book *Who Moved My Cheese*. She enticed us with an offer of a free copy of the book and breakfast on the company. I've heard good things about the book so I was in, and besides, when it's free, it's me.

Upon receiving my copy I skimmed the contents and quickly determined it was written in an easy to understand format, with a majority of the book consisting of a story of two mice and two little people, all who are looking for cheese in a maze. In fact, I found this book so easy to comprehend that I started reading the maze story to my daughter at bedtime. Surprisingly, she was very engaged and protested when I declared it was time for lights out.

I decided though that my continued reading would be alone, because I had to focus and make sure I gleaned some insightful information from the story so I wouldn't look like a dummy at the book discussion. With highlighter in hand, I read through the book in two sittings finding it to be a quick read.

Again, most of it is a fairy tale, so to speak, focused on looking for cheese, which is a symbol for the things we want to have in life such as money, good health, etc. and the movement of that cheese which represents change. As I read, I found the story stimulated thoughts of how this applies to me and the real world. For instance how your perception about impending change, whether accurate or not, becomes your reality or if you embrace inevitable change and enjoy the journey you'll be far better off than resisting and focusing on the negative. Upon completing the book I broke out the laptop and typed up what I had highlighted. Typing complete, I was prepared for the discussion with my one page of "cliff notes" which would also serve as a summary of the key points that I could refer to in the future.

So the morning of our book discussion arrives and as I enter the conference room I immediately notice Tricia had laid out a cheese oriented breakfast buffet consisting of jalapeno pepper jack cheese and cheese Danish. But the most unusual "breakfast" cheese item was cheese balls. Not the type rolled in nuts, but the cheese flavored Styrofoam-like snack. I have partaken in some strange, unhealthful breakfast foods in my day. On an occasion or two, a cheese curl has been known to enter my mouth first thing in the morning, but that's only in the privacy of my own home. At work, I've got a vision-of-health image to maintain (those who have seen me before should be rolling their eyes now) so I pass over the cheese balls and strategically go for some fresh fruit and a bagel. With breakfast goodies in hand and a strawberry colored fruit puree drink that looked a little more appealing to me than the lawn grass green colored one, I sat down to deliberate with my colleagues.

This was my first book discussion. So as to not be disappointed, I kept my expectations in check. Boy was I surprised. Tricia came armed with a list of thought provoking questions. And provoke thoughts they did. As we discussed key portions of the book, someone always seemed to offer an insightful comment that provided a different perspective and added depth to what I learned.

In conclusion, I found the conversation very enlightening and was impressed by the value added from my associate's input. But the bigger picture is that I am fortunate to work with a company that takes the time to do something like this. That promotes learning and growth and most importantly is not only receptive to, but also strives for change. Never afraid to move cheese to make things better for the staff and our clients.

Got Questions? These Three Sites Have Answers

It's human nature to question. After all, if we never wondered about the world around us, how would we ever be inspired to create?

Fortunately, if you have questions, the Internet has answers. The web is filled with sites dedicated to answering any question that might pop into your head. Here is a look at three of the sites that can best answer your most pressing queries.

Quora: The minds behind Quora boast that the site connects you to everything you want to know about. And that's not an empty claim.

If you have a question, you can log onto Quora to get answers from people who share your interests. This often means that doctors, lawyers, economists, screenwriters, and police officers are providing your answers.

As an example, a dietitian might answer your question about how to eat healthy without grains. A long-distance runner might answer your query about how to best prepare for a marathon in chilly temperatures.

Ask MetaFilter: Ask MetaFilter operates under the concept that there are plenty of experts out there with the answers to just about any question you might have. It's an intriguing concept and, surprisingly, Ask MetaFilter usually does provide reliable answers to questions.

The questions on this site are broken into various categories, everything from human relations to technology to health to law and government.

On a recent visit to the site, for instance, people were asking when the fifth season of Mad Men will become available on iTunes Canada. Others asked more philosophical questions. One user, for instance, asked how mature she could possibly be when she considers the best way to make friends is to have the same enemies.

StackExchange: StackExchange is a relative newcomer to the online question-and-answer game. It is made up of a network of 85 question-and-answer sites, though, so it certainly boasts the breadth and depth that you'd want whether you have a question about your dog's incessant barking or the meaning behind that Nietzsche quote.

The site has certainly become popular. It already has 1.7 million users and has provided 7.1 million answers to 3.4 million questions.

Best of all? StackExchange's question-and-answer sites, broken into those serving fans of science fiction and fantasy, database users, cartographers, web designers, chefs, gaming junkies, and everyone else, are free and open to all.

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Which E-reader Deserves Your Money?

You're in the market for a new e-book reader. The good news is that this technology is growing in popularity. This means that there are plenty of choices for how you can spend your e-reader dollars.

Of course, that array of choices is also the bad news. Having so many options makes it difficult to decide

which device is right for you ...

Fortunately, the e-readers on the market today are all
high-quality items. They all do what they say. The only real differences between the products are fairly
minor, so no matter which e-reader you choose, the odds are you'll be happy with your purchase.

Here, then, is a look at three of the top e-readers to help you make your choice.

Nook Color: Barnes & Noble's Nook Color e-reader is both affordable and well designed. Today, you
can purchase the Nook Color for under $140. That's not a bad bargain.

And perhaps because of its association with the country's largest book seller, the Nook Color provides a
superior reading experience. The Nook Color is adept at both prose and graphic display. This makes
reading children's books and graphic novels a pleasure. There are also several user functions that are a
joy to use. For instance, if you don't know the definition of a word in that Mark Twain novel you're
reading, just press it. A definition will pop up.

The Nook Color also comes with several built-in applications, including Pandora, an e-mail reader, a web
browser, and an addictive crossword puzzle game. You can boost the power of your Nook Color by
downloading apps from the app store. Here you'll find Netflix, the Smithsonian Channel, and several
other top apps.

The only drawback of the Nook color? Its app store, while boasting plenty of choices, sometimes lacks
some of the more cutting-edge apps out there. Here's hoping that the Nook Color will introduce apps at
a quicker pace.

Kindle Fire: The Kindle Fire is the main competitor to the Nook Color. That being said, it's remarkably
similar to the e-reader offered by Barnes & Noble. Both e-readers offer a terrific reading experience.
Words and images are crisp and clean on the Kindle Fire. And this reader comes with its own email
client, web browser, and app store.

Kindle does, of course, have a particularly strong connection to Amazon movies. This allows Kindle users
to access a wide range of movies and TV shows—many for a fee but many others free for Amazon
Prime members.

The Kindle is affordable, too, with a price tag under $200 today. Like the Nook Color, it is much like a
scaled-down version of a full tablet.

The only downsides with the Kindle Fire? Some of its controls are far from intuitive. For instance, there's
not a volume control anywhere on the device. To control the volume on the Kindle Fire, you need to tap
the screen.

Otherwise, though, the Kindle Fire is yet another good e-reader buy.

Kobo eReader: The Kobo eReader Touch doesn't have the name recognition of either the Nook Color or the Kindle Fire. But that doesn't mean it's not a worthy competitor. In fact, you wouldn't go wrong by spending your e-reader dollars on this nifty device if reading is your main goal.

Users rave about the reading experience on the Kobo. Images and words are sharp and easy to read. In fact, the Kobo offers seven different font styles and 17 different font sizes for readers to choose from. Others rave about the device's soft, quilted back. Don't laugh; this back helps make holding a Kobo feel more like holding a real book. That's a feature that the Nook Color or Amazon Kindle can't boast.

At the Kobo store, you can download e-books in a wide range of formats. The Kobo is especially good with comic books and other graphics-heavy books. And then there's this: When the Kobo's Wi-Fi feature is shut off, the device's battery life can last for as long as one full month. Pretty impressive.

Of course, the Kobo doesn't boast all the features of a Nook Color or an Amazon Fire. But for those who want to concentrate on reading, this e-reader does the job.

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Effectively Managing Remote Workers and Contractors

Thanks to improved technology, a growing number of employees have the ability to complete most or all of their work from home. Smartphones, tablet computers, teleconferencing, and Wi-Fi-equipped bookstores and coffee shops have made this possible.

This presents a big advantage for employers: the more employees that work from home, the less money companies have to spend. Many companies, for example, don't have assigned computers and desks for each of their workers because so much of their workforce is working remotely. At the same time, employees working remotely are often more productive; they're not wasting time and energy commuting to work every day. And they're not exchanging office gossip in front of the water cooler once they do arrive in the office.

Remote worker challenges
Remote workers and contractors do present at least one significant challenge to employers: It can be difficult for employers to effectively monitor the hours that their workers are putting in. How do employers know, after all, if their remote employees are pounding away at their keyboards or playing Angry Birds on their smartphones all day?

Employers can resolve this dilemma by setting reasonable deadlines for their remote employees and expecting these workers to meet them. What really should matter for employers is that work is done on time. It shouldn't matter if workers complete their tasks from midnight to four in the morning.

Setting remote worker deadlines

Employers might tell their remote workers that they must turn in a certain amount of work every Wednesday and Friday. This will make sure that remote employees are doing their work. Employers might also schedule regular updates by phone, video chat, or through instant messaging, during which workers can explain how far along they are with certain tasks.

Other employers prefer to require that their remote workers spend at least one day a week or two days a month on site. This gives these workers face time with their managers, something that helps everyone stay focused on upcoming deadlines and goals.

Off-site not a permanent condition

Employers need to remember, too, that remote workers don't have to stay that way. If employers discover that their off-site employees are not meeting deadlines or are turning in sub-par work, they can require that these workers return to the office on a full-time basis.

Trust remains the key component of a remote working relationship. Employers must place some trust in their workers that they will complete their jobs on time. Workers must display that they are worthy of this trust by hitting their deadlines, turning in quality work, and responding quickly to phone calls or email messages.

A Bold Look at the History of the Computer

It's difficult to imagine life without the computer. Today we carry miniature computers—that's what smartphones are, after all—in our pockets. However, there was a time not too long ago when the majority of consumers didn't have a single computer in their homes.

How did computers become such a key appliance in such a short amount of time? That's the question that science historian and writer George Dyson asks, and answers, in his new book, *Turing's Cathedral*, a sort of personal history of the computer.

Dyson has a unique vantage point that makes him the perfect author for this book. He's the son of a top scientist, Freeman Dyson, and because of this spent much of his years at the Princeton Institute for Advanced Studies. The Institute was home to the globe's most talented scientific minds—including Einstein's—as they were in the middle of building and operating the first digital computers under the guidance of scientist Josh von Neumann.

After you've read *Turing's Cathedral*, you'll discover just how much chance went into creating the machine that led to the computers we now take for granted. The personalities at the Princeton Institute didn't always mesh well, but somehow they managed to create the world's first digital computer. This

machine was assembled and run from an otherwise nondescript building in New Jersey.

Like all great projects, this one featured more than its share of rivalries, fall-outs, and, of course, salty language. The people behind this project were geniuses. They weren't saints. The book also covers the important ethical issues the creators of the computer faced by the close relationship of their computer work to the U.S. nuclear weapons project.

You might think that a history of the computer would be a dry read. You might think that it'd be filled with impossible-to-understand jargon. Fortunately, Dyson's history of the computer makes for a fascinating read, and you don't need an advanced degree to understand it.

Anyone who uses a computer—and that's an awful lot of people today, isn't it?—should pick up a copy of *Turing's Cathedral*. You might be surprised at what you learn.

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Inbox Zero: Productivity Booster or Time Waster?

How many messages fill your email inbox this morning? If you're like most people, that number could be in the high thousands.

Here's another question: Is a cluttered mailbox a bad thing?

Does a cluttered inbox equal a cluttered mind?
Merlin Mann, creator of the 43 Folders website, a site devoted to helping people find the time to do their best creative work, thinks so. He's also the creator of Inbox Zero, a drive to encourage computer users to shed the clutter of a crammed email inbox.

Mann views a cluttered inbox as one more distraction preventing people from focusing on the creative side of their lives. Instead of creating something—anything, really—Mann argues, people are wasting time pouring through their email inboxes for important messages, reading newsletters, and logging onto message boards.

For Mann, it's not about having an email inbox with zero messages. It's about having an inbox that doesn't distract you from more important and creative tasks.

Inbox Zero: not everyone's favorite
Not everyone, though, is in favor of the Inbox Zero concept. Some, such as writer Mac Slocum with O'Reilly Radar, view the Inbox Zero movement as a bit of a time waster itself. Slocum writes that his inbox, as of early this year, had 10,021 unread messages. Most of these messages come in the form of ignored newsletters and useless information, he writes.

Because of this, he writes, the more than 10,000 ignored email messages don't bother him.

However, Slocum also writes that he doesn't fault people who do pursue the goal of an empty email inbox. He's just surprised at how many people today feel so passionately about the goal. He even asks his readers who are pursuing Inbox Zero if they feel that an empty inbox makes them more productive or helps them get more work done.

Does online world mirror bricks-and-mortar one?
Perhaps the real answer is the fairly unsatisfying one: "It depends." In the brick-and-mortar world, people have different work styles. Some employees thrive with a messy, cluttered desk. Others can only concentrate when all of their papers, manuals, and tools are neatly organized.

Why, then, should it be any different with email inboxes? Some people can fight through a cluttered inbox and can only accomplish their tasks when those inbox messages are whittled down to a more manageable number. Others don't mind the mess of a cluttered inbox at all.

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