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12-9-2009

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Education is the easy button for computers

Kevin Lee Elder

Last year, my colleague Bill McCartney wrote about organizational problems and the desire for an "easy button." You've all seen ads where everything is going wrong until someone pulls out the easy button and pushes it.

The commercials work, because the humor and the point hit at a truth: We all wish we had an easy button for our lives.

For more than 60 years, we have been trying to make computers easier to use. While we have had much success — no one is using punch cards or reading hexadecimal code much any more — we keep looking for the easy button.

The closest thing to an easy button for computers is education. The more you learn how your computer and information systems work, the easier it should be to get more out of them.

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Less time, money and effort should be required to use our computer systems. When we know more about how they work and how they should work — that is if we get educated and are computer literate — we'll get more done.

The analogy I use to convince my business students to get computer educated is the automobile.

We all know what to do when we get in the car and it won't start. We pop open the hood and start diagnosing where the problem is and how to fix it, right? Wrong! Most of us will end up calling the auto repair place and have it towed there.

The mechanic, or expert, pops open the hood and diagnoses the problem. Then he tells you the bad news. The alternator, starter, plugs, etc. need replacement for it to start again.

Might as well tell us the doohickey and whatchamacallit need replacing, because it is all foreign to most of us. $1,500 dollars minimum to get almost anything fixed, and we can't question it because we aren't automobile literate. Since we are dependent on using our car to get to work, we simply pay the price.

The same thing applies to your computers and information systems. When they won't start or when they give you the blue screen of death, we don't pop open the hood — even after we repeatedly close all the windows and try again, hoping for a different outcome the second or third time around.

We call the IT or computer guys, the experts, and they tell us what is wrong: The RAM is too small, you need a new graphics card, you need more cache, and, of course, the latest doohickey, too.

We are dependent on using our computers even more than we are on our cars, so we pay the price, no questions asked.

Where is the easy button?

How do we break this dependency and get more productive?

We need to get educated. We need to get computer literate. We need to understand how the computers and systems should be operating because, as a primary user, we are part of the system.

Take a course at your local school and learn the basics about hardware, software, data, networks, people, policies and procedures.

Then, you won't need to look for an easy button. You will already know how to make your computer easier to use. Education in information systems is the easy button for computers.

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