

# What to do When Your Star Salespeople Won't Use Technology

by Mike Foster

As technology becomes increasingly more prevalent in our business culture, so too does technophobia—an acknowledged medical condition whereby a person feels anxious or frustrated when using technology equipment. In fact, a recent survey by *Computer Monthly* found that more than half of all Americans suffer from some degree of technophobia. Chances are, a few of those people are on your sales team. If so, you undoubtedly know the signs. Just the mere mention of computers, palm pilots, pagers, and cell phones causes these people to feel anxious and afraid. They also constantly doubt their own technology abilities.

Sales managers often have a difficult time dealing with technophobes on their staff. While they know their team can reach the sales goals, they watch certain individuals fall short of quota as their technophobia keeps them from optimizing every sales encounter. The technophobic sales people refuse to use the computer on their desk to keep track of prospects; instead, they rely on memory or an undecipherable paper system. They neglect to check their e-mail because they're afraid to dial up to the Internet. They may even fail to give prospects their pager or cell phone number, as they don't want to learn how to use these simple technology devices.

The technophobic sales people frustrate and scare themselves internally when they have to use technology or even imagine using it. They may say things like, "If I push the wrong button, I'm going to break the machine," or "I'm stupid because everyone knows this but me." As a result, they avoid all contact with technology related equipment, and their sales suffer.

The fact is that your sales teams' success depends on their ability to operate in a technological society. Not being able to cope with technology or refusing to utilize its advantages can leave

individuals behind and put a damper on corporate profits. As a sales manager, your job is to help your technophobic sales people integrate technology into their day so they can become the star performers your team needs. Following are some suggestions for eliminating technophobia from your sales environment.

## 1. Take the fear out of technology.



Most technophobic people have a pre-existing belief that computers must be difficult to use. They rationalize that anything that costs a thousand dollars or more must be complicated, and they don't want to risk pressing the wrong button and breaking the machine.

The key to overcoming this fear is to show your sales people how simple and resilient the technology really is. Sit down with them and go over some basic applications. Show them how simple it is to open a file, enter information, and save

and retrieve the document. As you talk, avoid using complex terminology. Technological language only makes it more difficult for the average user to learn. Keep your language simple and at a level your sales people can understand.

Also, allow the sales people to "play" with the equipment by pressing buttons and clicking through programs. Assure your technophobic employees that they can't break the equipment (unless, of course, they hit it with a hammer), and that computers are designed with the novice in mind, so it's doubtful they'll erase the entire hard drive. Once you help your sales people alleviate their underlying fear, they'll be more receptive to some advanced learning.

## 2. Appeal to their productivity.

Most people want to add balance to their life. They want more time for their friends and family, and they want to get the most work done in the least amount of time. Your technophobic sales people are no different. Utilize this desire by showing them how incorporating technology into their workday will create more free time and allow them to be more productive.

For example, introduce them to contact management software and explain how the program can help them keep track of clients, organize tasks, and conduct better follow up. Demonstrate how having a cell phone or a pager eliminates hours of telephone tag. Give concrete examples of how and when to use the technology, as well as indications of how much more work they'd accomplish in less time. Finally, allow them to observe how your non-technophobic sales people are utilizing technology. Let them view first hand how the technology increases productivity, and thereby profits. In most cases, once the rewards of the technology are proven, the technophobic people will make more of an effort to accept it into their life.

### **3. Ease them in slowly.**

As you go through steps one and two, remember not to force your sales people to use any technology in a specific way. They obviously have systems in place that are working for them (albeit ineffectively), and expecting them to relinquish those systems overnight is foolish. Plus, the more you force, the more they'll resist and become disgruntled. Instead, allow them to get used to the various technology tools at their own pace.

Once your technophobic employees know which tools are available, let them decide which ones would be most beneficial for them. Offer additional training for any piece of equipment, but don't forcefully send them to school. As they "play" with the technology, they'll have a natural inclination to learn more, and they will eventually suggest training courses that would benefit them. Then, as they get used to one piece of equipment, give them a budget so they can gradually increase

their technology repertoire. The more they learn to like their new gadgets, the quicker they'll express an interest in more advanced products.

To give any slow learners a gentle nudge, consider distributing some important information only via the e-mail or the company's intranet. This will encourage them to use these tools more regularly. Also, make some of the e-mailed documents ones that require responses, so your technophobic sales people can practice sending and forwarding messages, as well as opening and sending attachments.

As your sales people practice using the new technology, keep the pressure off of them. Realize that mistakes are part of the learning process, and assure them that all technology has some bugs and not all problems are their fault. Only through practice and positive reinforcement will you be able to assist them with overcoming their technology fears.

While technophobia is a curable condition, it will take time and dedication on your part. Realize that many people will resent any type of change, especially one that is technologically related. However, if you want to keep your key employees, no matter how technophobic they are, and encourage them to sell better, then you will implement the above suggestions into your sales department today. With perseverance, the technophobia will diminish, and your sales figures will soar.

### **About the Author:**

*Mike Foster is a frequent presenter of keynote speeches, seminars, and workshops. His message about how to use technology to increase profits and productivity is welcomed by small business owners and Fortune 10 executives alike. He has a 20-year background in computer technology including 12 years owning his own technology firm. For more information about Foster's programs, call 800-657-7107 or visit [www.fosterinstitute.com](http://www.fosterinstitute.com) or [www.internetmisuse.com](http://www.internetmisuse.com).*