BE THE FIRST TO SEE YOUR FUTURE WITH TECHNOLOGY'S HELP, COMPANIES' VISIONS REACH EVEN FARTHER

BY MARK BRESLIN

EXPENSIVE LEATHER CRADLES my head. Observing doctors in ill-fitting suits politely gawk. I'm a bug under a weird kid's magnifying glass. Ten seconds of fate before me. I squint into the steel aperture. I can hear them revving the equipment for a redline test. I feel pressure on my bladder, but dare not say. Be brave, I think...'cause it's too late to back out, now. This is very big.

For some years my staff has been witness to my projection of a personal magnetic disturbance that breaks copiers, crashes hard drives and jams faxes. I am a walking Bermuda Triangle. I've cussed a blue streak at more machines than business agents, despite this generation's adoration of Google and Gates.

I have worn glasses since I was 12. Not indent-your-nose, Coke-bottle, hey-four-eyes optical bad boys; just your garden variety one-hour specials. Why was I so cursed? I was not made to have glasses or contacts; except to sit on, break, bend, scratch, fog-up, twist or lose. It became apparent to me some time ago that I was headed toward the round lawyer style specs with a pipe and elbow patches. But to bike, run, dive, raft, mountain climb and, very occasionally, drink to excess; I needed an alternative plan...

Maybe it's just me, but often it seems that the promise of technology tends to exceed the actual experience. Somewhere, someone has no bugs or problems — like a man married to a Stepford wife. But since most of us don't have such luck or the patience to achieve technological nirvana, we tend to shy away from the possibilities. Too much hype? Find yourself or your next date on the Internet or World Wide Web? Treos. Blackberrys. Databases. Integrated systems. Streaming video. My Space. You Tube and much, much more. It's really not about how uncomfortable the rapid technological changes are making you, it's more about how you can turn technology into a strategic advantage for you and your union or business. Ah, but the pain, the confusion, the risks.

Ten pairs of specs. Five pairs of contacts. Busted, broken, bent and benevolently left behind for some other blurry-eyed fool. Eye exercises? If I can't get ripples on my gut, I sure won't get them on my cornea. Since I was 5, I was warned to keep sharp objects away from my eyes. But some years ago, across the technological horizon, I could see it coming. Darth Vader and Captain Kirk endorsed: the laser beam. It is the early 1990s and I have decided to be among the very first guinea pigs to go with LASIK laser eye surgery.

News flash. Technology is a competitive issue that cannot be ignored. And, despite all the rhetoric, business and labor do not always embrace this concept as they simply choose to bandwagon. Productivity enhancement. Organizational restructuring.

But when it hums, when the team is trained and tuned, and that promise becomes the reality, you can only feel sorry for the guy who doesn't yet believe.

Technology leading to diversification. Buzz, buzz, buzz go the words. And yet we still resist, until a vision of the future becomes so clear, guess what? We have the next million workers in our industry who have been born and bred to technology. There IS NO TIME TO WAIT.

With my 20-350 vision I squint at the best EXPERIMENTAL eye surgeon on the West Coast. In a reassuring and casual tone he describes how by shooting a laser into my eye I'll likely obtain enhanced vision. He includes all the basic FDA mandated warnings. I consider my next job as the Raider mascot. But somewhere down deep I believe. And so I decide to bet my eyes on technology.

Business and unions large and small must take the bet. Technology is now better than most of our capacity for its use. Ready for online union meetings? Ready for real time streaming video? Union recruiting and apprentice instruction on line? Ready for job updates on your I-Pod? Ready for 100 percent integration? I had to be dragged into this mode for the past five years, kicking and screaming at every dollar and vendor and broken promise. But when it hums, when the team is trained and tuned, and that promise becomes the reality, you can only feel sorry for the guy who doesn't yet believe.

For an industry full of risk-embracers, I sure see a lot of pushing back and stalling. It is very important to remember that most technological advances that are true competitive advantages are outside our comfort zones. By the time everyone is "on," it's just another industry standard. Now is the time to reach. As any company or union reaches, you must push the limits of your pain threshold. Consider reaching and risking a little extra for your dreams and visions; they could probably stand improvement.

Two weeks later. Me, the technician and an eye chart. "Can you read that first line?" No problem. "Can you read the next line?" Bam-bam-bam. Can you read the next line? I nail it. (She looks excited.) How about the next one? Zing. "That's 20-20; you

have perfect vision," she exclaims. "How about the next line," I ask, always pushing the limits. "O, N, 5, V".... she ranks me at a 20-15 — an eagle eye. "It should become even sharper," she says with a tone like someone just gave her roses. I only wish I had one to give. I'm the best result yet. I took the risk, the technology delivered and I'm a poster boy for the process. I quietly smile at her while wanting to laugh aloud inside. Outside the office, the sun and wind ripple across the leaves of an elm tree. The details do not escape me.



Mark Breslin is a trainer and author specializing in labormanagement challenges and solutions. He is the author of the recently published Attitudes and Behaviors: Survival of the Fittest curriculum for apprentice training centers. The curriculum is now being used by union training centers, and has been established as standard course programming by other international unions and apprenticeship programs. Instructional material and further information is available at www.breslin.biz.

