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Is Keeping Up with Technology Overrated?

by Tony Batory



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Information technology has come to the front of the healthcare reform debate, and your recent article¹ underlines a recurring theme about its value. But for some years, I have had the impression the technology is overrated.

Earlier in this decade, there were two incidents:

1. Hype over tech pushed the NASDAQ over 5000. And the bubble burst when the market realized that supporting profits (and value) just weren't there.
2. The second incident was personal; I was deciding if I should get a cell phone. My actuarial side said that the probability of an emergency with no other recourse was too small to justify the cost. I could not put any value on 'buy a gallon of milk on your way home from work'.

Today, I still don't have a cell phone and benefit from the lack of silly interruptions and I always drive with two hands. Don't get me started on bills with 100 line items, multiple-year contracts or warranties on lost, stolen or wet units.

More recently I have turned my impression into a demonstration with simple semantics. Information is not power; knowledge is power. Knowledge is a subset of information that is useful, reliable, statisti-

cally credible, pertinent, legally enforceable, usable and applicable.

I'm not talking about the 13th decimal place on a spreadsheet or an Internet search that produces 2.5 million references. As technology makes more information available, knowledge becomes a smaller and smaller subset. We don't have a knowledge super-highway, knowledge technology departments, knowledge science programmers or messages sent FYK.

In the healthcare 'modernization' debate, there's significant discussion about technical advancements, e.g. to define efficient treatment protocols. Earlier generations of managed care providers were successful making changes in this area. But the social and legal environment pushed back on the invasive/intrusive nature of managed care. Whether we have high-tech support for this newest generation of managed care may be irrelevant.

I'm certain that techies will disagree with what I've said. Let me try something more palatable. It's not the technology that has value, but how you use it. Would I want an entry level person to text me during a meeting? NOT. ●

¹ "Why Keep Up With Technology" by Paula Hodges, April 2009 issue of *The Stepping Stone*.