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Balance High-Tech, With a High-Touch Environment

Millions of dollars have been wasted on costly MIS (management information systems) and hardware before discovering that human capital needs must precede high-tech needs.

by **Denis Waitley**

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You must think like a high-tech research firm, and act like a high-touch service firm to succeed in the borderless, global economy. The investment in human capital, the primacy of people, may be the most important consideration in networking for the future. Some managements that are re-engineering their organizations and workforces are swerving off course with a belief that their first priority must be to install high-tech information systems. As they see it, this is doing first things first in the difficult adaptation to the new global competition.

> **In fact, the most important re-engineering may have more to do with people than systems – or, to put it another way, the transformation may have to be more cultural than technological.**

Millions of dollars have been wasted on costly MIS (management information systems) and hardware before discovering that human capital needs must precede high-tech needs.

I'm not suggesting that new systems, in particular information systems, are anything less than utterly essential.

> **It would be fatal to believe that by being a warm, high-touch, customer-focused firm or individual, you can avoid the investment in technology that offers access to the global information network.**

It may amuse you or please you that your grade-school children tend to be far more comfortable and skillful than you, their parents, with the computer and with the Internet.

More to the point, nearly all school children in the developing Asian nations – at least, so far, in the major cities – are becoming truly computer literate. This is so central a determinant of who will succeed in the future that to fall behind is like being sentenced to travel via freight train in the age of orbital space travel.

> **Successful firms and individuals must be on the cutting edge of technological and human skills. You must have both.**

Heaven help you if you're a techie who believes that being high-tech is enough to put you in touch with the world; that electronic wizardry alone will somehow provide the necessary customer satisfaction. That will get you run right over on the information superhighway. The Asian countries clearly recognize the need to blend touch with technology.

As one of America's most frequent flyers and travelers, I see a great contrast between customer service in the United States and other

Western societies, and in Asia. I can no longer count the number of times I have missed my flight connections in the United States due solely to the lack of sensitivity and conscientiousness on the part of airline staff to cater more to the needs of connecting passengers.

If performance bonuses were tied to on-time departures and excellent service, I feel there would be a marked improvement.

I also can't count the number of times when I've traveled for most of a day or night, arrived at a crowded lobby, and waited in line for over twenty-five minutes only to be told that a convention had caused some unfortunate overbooking. But if I'd waited another half-hour or so, a shuttle bus would take me and the others to an overflow hotel which was no more than another half-hour away.

For comparison, I could pick virtually any Asian hotel of any standing, but one that comes to mind is my experience with Stanley Yen and Taiwan's Ritz Hotel some years ago. To ensure that my stay would be comfortable, he sent me a customer-focused questionnaire several weeks in advance. Did I prefer king, queen or two beds? Down or regular pillows? Soft or medium firm? Would I require a computer, fax or VCR? What beverages would I like in my minibar? Nothing was left to chance. When we arrived at the Taipei airport, three Mercedes limousines pulled up in front of the baggage claim area. The driver of the first was in a tuxedo, complete with a top hat. He jumped out, ran to the baggage carousel, spotted the gold plated bag tags the hotel had sent us in advance to identify our luggage, and retrieved our bags. With a beam and a bow, he said, "Welcome to the Ritz Hotel, Denis Waitley and family."

The driver radioed the hotel indicating each of our names and where we were seated in the cars, one car for the luggage and two for the passengers. The general manager was at the door of the hotel when we arrived. He greeted us by name as we left the limos, then escorted us through the lobby directly to the elevators. I asked about checking in. He smiled and said, "We have been expecting you, and we knew you would be tired from your travels," and therefore all registration would be handled by a simple credit card imprint after we were in our rooms. Our shoes were shined, luggage repaired, buttons sewed on... the response to everything was, "Can do, no problem."

This is the economic battlefield of the 21st Century in miniature. There is more high-rise construction in Shanghai, China, than in any other city in the world. Government-owned Singapore Airlines, rated continually at the top in customer service, is also a training institute for top executives, who learn how flight stewards and stewardesses, the most skillful in the business, cater to passenger customers. After our every sip of water in a Hong Kong restaurant, our glasses were refilled to the rim. My family and I noticed that every waiter and waitress seemed like little radar stations, searching for where service would next be needed. Our young waiter, who was computer literate and totally bilingual, was working his way through college and planning to finish his study of finance at Stanford University.

When he refilled our glasses yet again, we asked him why the service was so good. He replied, *"Because there are hundreds of thousands waiting to take our jobs. If we don't refill your glasses every time, someone else is ready and willing to do it."* This is why we must all be high-tech and high-touch.

From Taiwan to Malaysia, from Brazil to Mexico, from India to Eastern Europe, the new competitors are hungry immigrants with cell phones and laptops, willing to stay late, and doing anything necessary to get a seat at our banquet table.

Action Idea: In your business, what is one thing you can suggest that will improve the customer service of your organization?

Denis Waitley is one of America's most respected and beloved authors, keynote lecturers and productivity consultants on high performance human achievement. He has inspired, informed, challenged and entertained audiences for over 25 years from the boardrooms of multi-national corporations to the control rooms of NASA's space program. Denis has been voted business speaker of the year by the Sales and Marketing Executives' Association and by Toastmasters' International and inducted into the International Speakers' Hall of Fame.

With over 10 million audio programs sold in 14 languages, Denis Waitley's CD album, *The Psychology of Winning*, is still the all-time best selling program on self-mastery. To order this Best-Seller or his newest release, *The Platinum Collection* and to subscribe to the free Denis Waitley Weekly E-zine visit his website here: DenisWaitley.com