

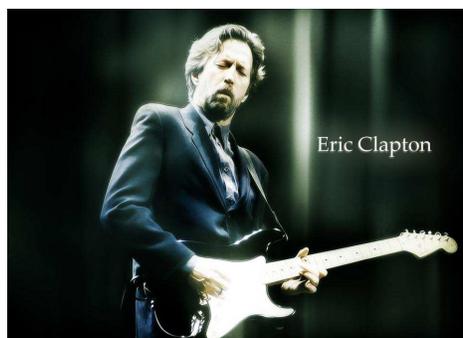
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## February 2014 LearningFlash Innovation and the VPs of Electricity

Many of our customers sit in either Information Technology organizations or Human Resource organizations. Both of these are support organizations and considered costs to the business. Cost of goods sold is something all CEOs want out of their business as much as possible. Support departments are seen as an unfortunate necessity similar to 'you have to have a vacuum cleaner'. Claims are made that to become more innovative (BWOM - Buzz Word of the Moment) these support organizations must now become strategic, business-driving partners. While lowering the budget, HR must deliver ever-changing competencies through people and IT must keep the data flowing while creating instant solutions to marketing's new product ideas.

Granted, the truth is there have been plenty of times that IT and HR deliver solutions that are doppelgangers (not-so-nice imitation of a real solution). Sometimes the staff in these areas do not behave as if the rest of the company is their reason for being. With all the cost and time pressures, it's easiest to deliver almost good-enough solutions - who will know the difference?



My company is a consulting and training company. We believe that we deliver fun, fast, flexible and measurable learning/performance to individuals who are a critical part of important organizations. While on the plane to one of these gigs, I read about [freeguitarvideos.com](http://freeguitarvideos.com). You pay \$29.95 (was \$69, on sale now!) for Jody Worrell to show you how to play like Eric Clapton, using their DVD and book. There is a huge list of other guitar players you can learn to imitate. I have played a little classical and acoustical guitar, so this sounded cool. I thought about trying it and it scared me. We do not do guitar training but the premise is the same. Can my company compete with a \$29 DVD and book? If we cannot prove that we add value, we cannot negotiate anything but price. My company structure, focused on customer service, delivery

expertise and experiential learning, is too expensive to drive products that cost \$29. Important CEO question: what is the value I must deliver and differentiate to prove to my customers that the extra dollars are well worth it?

Similar discussions rage in IT. Here is a piece that is getting lots of praise and creating angst written by Info-Tech Research Group:

*In the early 1900's, big companies often had a Vice President of Electricity. Securing large amount of power was a big deal, complex generators, technicians, engineers were required to operate them, and someone senior needed to be in charge of all of that.*

There are no longer VPs of Electricity. Is it possible that in the accelerating future there will be no VP of IT? That technology will belong to everyone, easily delivered and only noticed when it is not there? Is the role of IT more complex than that? The Electricity department disappeared when power companies standardized the whole process and built the infrastructure so each company would not have to. Outsourced. As one of my friends says "Don't grow a career around something that can be done by someone else for less money somewhere else."

A Forrester study of 900 end users and 900 IT professionals, in January 2013, found, for example, that 84% of business users experienced a severe or moderate impact on their ability to be productive on a monthly basis, as a direct result of IT issues. 14% experienced difficulties at least once per day. The study also revealed that there is a large gap between how the business thinks about IT and how IT thinks about itself. The difference varies regionally, between 13 to 16 percentage points. Is this a valid argument for the CIO position or an angry cry from the 'users' that more value is expected and might be found elsewhere?



There are two trends in our personal lives going away from commoditization. The growth of small, independent restaurants that provide an intimate and exclusive experience is booming. Here in Indy we have invented a made-up neighborhood, SoBro, to keep our cool restaurants in, although they are sprouting up everywhere. As a similar example, McDonald's and Starbucks continue to convince me that I need to pay a lot more for coffee, clearly a commodity prior to the idea of baristas. They have both added value that has driven my purchase choices and speed is not the value. It seems that in a world of instant everything, we still crave and live for connection with people and a sense of community.

There is a growing attention to mindfulness, emotional intelligence and learning to stop. Check out the current cover of TIME. People are hungry to connect, this is illustrated well in a piece from The Harvard Crimson, referring to Drake, a classmate who had tragically died:

*I am no saint; I neglect my parents and have my fair share of grumpy days. It is easy to prioritize other things in the midst of midterms and financial crises. As we get older those distractions become still stronger, and it becomes even easier to keep to ourselves. But I try to remember that the fragility of our existence is all the more reason to cherish every day, to make the effort to connect with others. One of the speakers at Drake's funeral said this of his life: "Rather than being counted in days, his was better measured in lives touched." An admirable goal for us all. Anneli L. Tostar '15, a Crimson news writer, is an anthropology concentrator in Eliot House.*

I was recently honored to design and deliver a one day facilitated session called Focused Performance for McDonald's.

[Focused Performance Course Information.pdf](#)

In this session, we defined strategy, prioritized projects using the strategy, then boiled it all down to a daily to-do list. We discussed strengths and motivators as an organization that could create blind spots and lack of focus. Below are some questions to get all of us thinking more clearly about our value and how that value drives connection between humans. We invite you to learn in community by sharing your answers below at our [virtual community](#) or [email](#) them to us.

## Focused Performance

**Who is your customer? What do you deliver? Is that different than what your customer wants?**

Here are two examples:

**ELECTRICITY A NATURAL CURE!**  
 NO MORE USE FOR CRUTCHES OR DRUGS.  
**TAKE A TREATMENT FREE!**

I have so adapted my application of medical electricity that I positively cure Rheumatism, Nerve and Stomach Troubles and all affections of the vital organs. To illustrate the remedial power of my

**Dr. McLaughlin's Belt**

I will give you a free treatment in my office by the galvanic current from my grand stationary battery. This is a breezy and exhilarating test of that curative power now used the world over.

To cure your ailment I will fit you with one of my famous Belts, which you wear at night until your system becomes charged with the reviving voltage. This keeps up the action of the blood vessels, contracts and strengthens relaxed muscles and glands. It cures out impurities, which give the sense of pain, and restores to the body its wasted energy. You feel the glow, the enlivening sensation of this power from the start. The improvements my Belt possesses above all others are recognized and appreciated by the thousands who are using my application. The cures I have made the testimony from all quarters, the comfort of wearing my Belt, the method of adjusting the power, its thoroughly curative work, constitute it the pre-eminent remedy for the severest pain or the most trying weakness.

Call and take a treatment free from my Static Battery and test my Belt, or let me send you my new book, free.

**DR. M. A. McLAUGHLIN,**  
 1000 Madison Street, Geneva, Michigan, U. S. A.  
 And, through Agents, in every city and town in the United States.  
 Write to me: "Send me the book."

**Exciting and Kidney Trouble**  
 I will give you a free treatment in my office by the galvanic current from my grand stationary battery. This is a breezy and exhilarating test of that curative power now used the world over.



- HR: Let's say your customer is someone who wants to improve performance for the business to be more effective at meeting the business' customers needs. You have decided to put in a new Learning Management System so that it is less costly to keep track of training history, competency models and makes it easier to host e-learning. What did the customer want? The everyday learner could feel that you have added a bunch of rules and barriers to their ability to learn the way they uniquely need to learn. They could feel that you have eliminated their connection to others. They might want to eliminate you back.
- IT: IT has successfully transitioned your organization to the Cloud. You now have access to any data on any customer anywhere that has an internet connection. If you are a sales manager, how are you feeling about this? Is the learning curve and reliability steep enough to impact your sales commission? Has the added number of leads degraded your ability to deal with each customer uniquely? Has the connection to people been replaced by an ERP(Enterprise Resource Planning) package?



Often we confuse the product or service with the need. We are hammers looking for a nail, so all we see are nails. In training, I have been guilty of starting with the content that will be taught before finding out what the customer's performance need is. Richard Sites, co-author of [Leaving Addie for SAM](#), thank you for helping me realize that. The core question to ask all customers, internal and external is "what do they want and why?"

**Exercise:** Define who your customer is and what they care about.

## Diverge before you converge

You've got a million things to do and you are moving quickly - no time to fool around with wild ideas. You are awesome at converge and you make it happen. This addiction can prevent you from seeing that you and your value are becoming Blockbusters. Change occurs when we step aside for a bit and challenge what you are doing.



**Exercise:** Make a list of the last five projects you did. What school grade (A,B,C,D,F) do you give yourself for each of these projects? Think about who your customer was and guess what school grade they would give you for these projects. You likely have multiple customers and multiple grades. Now diverge: what would it look like if you did the project a different way? How could you have done each project by focusing on customer value including connection? How could you have been a cool little restaurant? For extra credit, do this with someone else.

## Build yourself a base



As the chaos rages and we push to get through it, it feels like we're in this crazy game of tag, running away from whoever is it. There are new rules now and everybody is it, except you. You clearly need a base to be able to get back to for a minute of peace. Build a mental base with the exercise below. Run back to this base and recite it to yourself when they are after you.

**Exercise:** Using three verbs and one noun, construct your personal Value Proposition. Answer the question, what value do I bring to the world? Here's mine to get started: I ignite, affirm



and sustain learning in self and others.

## A fool with a tool is still a fool

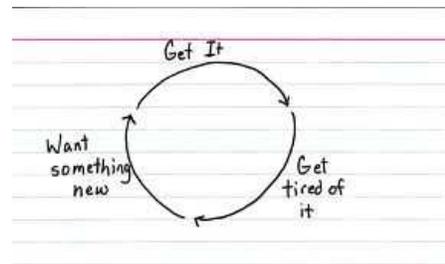
This is going to be conflicting homework. First of all, do not confuse delivery and options with value. Here is an example: "We are going to change all our training to e-learning because it is so much cheaper". If you want cheap training, send someone an article that you found online. Cost makes no sense unless it is in ratio to value (cost/value). "We are going to make everyone use our project management tool for all their projects so we can hold people accountable." Accountable makes no sense if you are not doing the right things for the right reasons that always have to do with the customer. Avoid anything that has 'always' in the sentence.

Be brave about new tools. Scott Kincaid, the CIO of Butler University, nuked his own organization. He invested in stepping back and looking at the customer. He connected with his team and built an organization that added value in the current and future world of Higher Education. Mary Cook from RMA facilitated this IT Evolution project. Increased value and sense of community were the outcomes, more than his customers even knew they wanted.

 [IT Innovation Evolution Course Information.pdf](#)

There is always a new application, tool, technique or idea that can help you do what you are here to do. Keep looking for them. Get on Twitter (seriously) and figure out what it's about because other people are finding community there. You might not, but at least you'll know what your choices are. I was recently in with a large group of CIOs and none of them had Twitter accounts. Their customers do.

**Exercise:** What is a tool that is sucking the life out of you? What are you doing that is a barrier to your success? What tool should you investigate to keep your options open?



## A fable to close



The explorer returned to his people, who were eager to know about the Amazon. But how could he ever put into words the feelings that flooded his heart when he saw exotic flowers and heard the night-sounds of the forests; when he sensed the danger of wild beasts or paddled his canoe over treacherous rapids?

He said, "Go and find out for yourselves."

To guide them he drew a map of the river. They pounced upon the map. They framed it in their Town Hall. They made copies of it for themselves. And all who had a copy considered

themselves experts on the river, for did they not know it's every turn and bend, how brood it was, how deep, where the rapids were and where the falls were? But no one took the journey.

## February Contest

Thanks to all who shared their goals for 2014 with us in January. We will be sending all eight of you a special gift to help keep you on track.

Here are some of our favorite responses from the January contest:

"I've had my fill of #17 (endures adversity), so I am going to focus on #19 - Reinvents himself and #20 - Is recognized by other professionals"

"2014 is going to be a great year! Thank you for holding me accountable. I am striving to focus on #8 (Acts in the face of fear) and #9 (Accepts no excuses)."

"We can do this! I am going to seek order (#6) and play it as it lays (#10)"

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## Where's RMA Next?



Click on the links below to get more information about events or email [bhelt@russellmartin.com](mailto:bhelt@russellmartin.com)

**Feb 3** Training Magazine Conference | San Diego | [Learn More](#)

**Feb 11** RMA Clinic: Project Management Scheduling Webinar | [Register](#)

**Feb 12** Emotional Intelligence for Improved Decision Making | Eli Lilly

**Feb 12** Essentials of AGILE Design: Blending Agile and ADDIE | [Register](#)

**Feb 24** 10 Steps to Successful Project Management | ISA

**Feb 25** Change your Game: Become your Company's Most Valuable Organization | TMN Free Webinar | [Register](#)

**Feb 26** Realistic Project Management | Indianapolis | [Register](#)

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