

## What's New

We're excited to present "Complete Managed Service Plan", our greatly improved managed service plan. The improvements we've implemented are based on our customer's request's. You asked us for 3rd party software support, local & cloud backup, phone support, and Office 365. We've done that and more.

We've also include onsite hours. Now, if we must come to your office during normal business hours to perform work on a covered computer, server or \*network device you will not be billed for those hours. With this addition, we believe your monthly IT costs are truly predictable!

## December 2016



This monthly publication provided courtesy of Jonathan Yarbrough, President of Merit Technology Consultants.

"As a business owner, you don't have time to waste on technical and operational issues. That's where we shine! Call us and put an end to your IT problems finally and forever!"



It was a typical morning at the offices of a small Midwestern online retailer. This company, whose name we cannot mention due to a non-disclosure agreement with our source (Gary Miller, GEM Strategy Management) owned a very successful online catalog offering a wide variety of women's apparel and accessories. They had a terrific reputation and brand, and every reason to be excited about their future.

Then, with a single click, the death spiral began...

An employee received an e-mail with a link to a benign-looking catalog. All it took was one click and the company's entire network was infected. The Crytowell malware dug deep into the company's accounting system and customer files, including credit card and social security numbers.

Fifteen thousand customer ac-

## Why Cyberthugs LOVE Your Business

counts were locked up by the malware. A ransom demand soon followed, requiring \$50,000 for the key. Unfortunately, the company's backup systems had been down for the last three months. With no way to remove the virus without destroying crucial data, the company had its back against a wall.

They paid for the decryption key. But no luck - it didn't work. Business came to a grinding halt. The company owners couldn't afford to rebuild their entire network. Within six months, the company closed its doors, strangled by a lack of sales and cash flow.

### Could this happen to you?

Hackers have discovered that small businesses make juicy targets. These criminals love going after small businesses because they're often the easiest to penetrate. IBM reports that over 62% of the 4,000 cyber-attacks that occur every day target small businesses.

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Cyberthieves filch information to rob bank accounts via wire transfers. They steal customers' personal identity information and resell it on black markets. They nab key information to file fraudulent tax returns, and commit health insurance or Medicare fraud – in your customers' names.

Most small businesses are easy prey because they fail to take precautions. But you don't have to be like most small businesses. Here are four things you can start doing TODAY to prevent a shutdown that could destroy your fortunes.

#### Understand evolving threats –

Know what's at risk in your company. Stay on top of the different schemes hackers use to gain entry. Learn all you can about phishing, spoofing, social engineering, malware, systems hacking, pharming and the latest scams so you can see them coming. Identify your company's weak points and bolster them as needed.

#### Institute a dual signature policy

– Require that two people sign off on every transaction. At the very least, when in doubt, pick up the phone. Verify all fund transfers or requests for payment before releasing funds.

#### Ingrain a solid data security policy in your company's culture

– Yes, you need to define and document protocols... but that's not enough. In order for them to work, they must permeate every activity you and your team engages in. Your employees are the gatekeepers of critical data. Train them to see the warning signs, engage in safe practices and respond effectively to an attack. Examples include using only unique, complex passwords and keeping a "clean desk," where sensitive information isn't exposed.

**Have – and practice – an incident response plan** – Just like a fire drill, being ready for a breach

gives your team an edge when faced with a crisis. When everyone knows exactly what to do, you're better able to nip a hack in the bud.

#### Why play Russian roulette with your company's data?

If you've been putting off cyber-protection measures, thinking, "Oh, that would never happen here," you are putting your company's entire future in jeopardy. NOW is the time to call in an expert you can trust to verify that your data is safe in today's rapidly evolving battle against a host of online bad guys.

When it comes to protecting your data – whether it's bank account information, customer and employee records or proprietary IP or processes – we've got you covered.

Through the end of December, we're offering our Cybersecurity Assessment at no cost to 10 companies in the Houston metroplex area. Call me at 713-931-4577 or e-mail me at [JYarbrough@MeritTC.com](mailto:JYarbrough@MeritTC.com) TODAY because we can only offer this valuable services to the first 10 companies that apply.

*“Your employees are the gatekeepers of critical data.”*

## The Ultimate Small Business Guide To Setting Up A Work-From-Home System For Your Staff

### You will learn:

- What telecommuting is and why so many small businesses are rapidly implementing work-from-home programs.
- The single most important thing you MUST have in place before starting any work-from-home or remote office initiative.
- How one company slashed its turnover rate from 33% to nearly 0% – and increased productivity by 18% – by implementing a work-from-home program.
- How to get a FREE “Home Office Action Pack” (a \$97 value).

Claim Your FREE Copy Today at [MeritTC.com/WorkFromHome](http://MeritTC.com/WorkFromHome)



## Services We Offer

- \* Managed Services
  - Network Security MGMT
  - 3rd Party Software Support
  - 24/7 Helpdesk
  - File Sync & Share
  - Complete PC Backup
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  - Office 365 (Word Excel, PowerPoint)
  - Exchange Online
  - VoIP Support
  - IT Vendor MGMT
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  - QTR Reports
  - Comprehensive IT Doc MGMT
- \* Server & Desktop Refreshes
- \* Network Security Implementations
- \* VoIP Phone Solutions
- \* Backup Disaster & Recovery Solutions
- \* Customized Cloud Solutions
- \* Give us a call today at: 713-931-4577 to discuss your needs

## 4 Steps to Become A More Genuine Leader

Communication is a skill – one that needs to be practiced to be perfected in a leader. And the root of all effective communication is honesty.

Unfortunately, CEOs and business owners often think that means totally unfiltered “brutal honesty” – however insensitive or accusatory. It’s no surprise that this method usually backfires and, over a sustained period of time, can lead to disheartened employees, high turnover and a lack of trust in management. But it doesn’t have to be that way. When honest communication is positive and constructive, it helps leaders build and maintain strong, loyal teams.

Here are four steps to open up lines of communication and become the “honesty standard leader” for your team:

**Show the “real you”** – Do people see who you really are, or are you playing a role? The fact is, people can see through your “act” more easily than you think. And those around you deserve to know the real you – not just the image you want to present as “the boss.” Admit that you’re human and share vulnerabilities with your team. Be honest about who you are and what’s going on in your life (the good and the bad), and your team will actually trust you more. They’ll begin to share their own stories and become more cohesive.

**Take time to listen** – You’re a leader. You’ve made it your business to do things the way you envision them in order to start your own company and make your dreams a reality. However, that doesn’t mean you should block out advice from

others – especially when it’s coming from your employees. Open yourself up to honest criticism and invite feedback about areas you may be overlooking. By trusting your employees with that kind of critique and seeking solutions that will benefit everyone, you’ll begin to encourage higher levels of truth in the workplace and gather the best ideas.

**Surround yourself with honest people** – Are you surrounded with lots of “yes” men and women? If people are just telling you what they think you want to hear, there is no benefit – least of all to your business. Ask for regular “truth checks” with your team. Are they providing ideas freely – especially those that might differ from yours – or do they hesitate to voice their opinions? Surround yourself with people bold and truthful enough to disagree with you. Without dissenting opinions, you’ll never exit your comfort zone, which will limit your personal and professional growth.

**Accept your imperfections** – You may be the one in charge, but you will never have all the answers. No one person can handle everything, and that includes you. Gather a team of truthful people who balance out your weaknesses with their strengths. Empower them to do what they do best, and play to everyone’s strengths – including your own.

Don’t hesitate to be vulnerable and open up in a genuine way with your employees. Genuine leaders don’t need to be “brutal” – just honest. Try it. Your employees – and you – will notice the difference.



Andy Bailey can cut through organizational BS faster than a hot knife through butter, showing organizations the logjams thwarting their success and coaching them past the excuses. After all, as he tells his clients, 100% annual growth is only 2% growth every week. It’s not easy. But possible. Andy learned how to build great organizations by building a great business, which he started in college then, grew into an Inc. 500 multi-million dollar national company that he successfully sold and exited. He founded Petra to pass on to other entrepreneurs, business owners and leaders the principles and practices he used to build his successful enterprise, which are rooted in the Rockefeller Habits methodology.

## This new kid on the block is a Galaxy and iPhone slayer.

Eight years in the making, Google has bypassed its Android partners with the new Pixel phone. While it won't win any visual design awards, Pixel sports a rich feature set that raises the bar for smartphone performance. Foremost is its blistering speed. Google spent a lot of time "tuning the hell out of the platform," as one Google spokesperson said. Plus, its Snapdragon 821 chipset keeps its cool – literally – and avoids throttling better than the Snapdragon 820 featured in the Galaxy S7 and other premium smartphones. And Pixel's camera, call quality and battery life are all "top of class." Priced from \$649 to \$869, it's a premium phone – with premium pricing.

-Forbes

## Are you getting full value from your lunch break?

Here are three ways to make that precious time slot pay off for you: 1) Break bread with clients. Learn about their business and build rapport. They're less likely to leave when you know what really bugs them and what their goals are. 2) Go work out. A carb-laden lunch

bogs you down for the next few hours. Breaking into a sweat, on the other hand, gives you energy and makes you more productive. Besides being good for you, a good workout clears your head and lets you think through challenges. 3) Take a siesta. What?! Yep. Siesta. A midday "power nap" improves mental acuity. And well-rested people perform at the top of their game.

-Entrepreneur

## Here's why Mark Zuckerberg thinks chatbots are a big deal.

Chatbots respond automatically to chat messages you receive. They've been around since AOL's Instant Messenger (AIM). But with artificial intelligence and a huge surge in messaging-app popularity, their potential for things like customer service is exploding. In fact, more people now use messaging apps like Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp and WeChat than social networks. Chatbots can help you cut costs and scale up. It can talk with thousands of people at once, while a customer service rep can speak with only one at a time. Yet hurdles remain. For example, you don't want this kind of response: "Siri, I'm bleeding really badly.

Call me an ambulance." "From now on I'll call you 'An Ambulance.' OK?"

-Inc.com

## Double your sales team's productivity.

Give fitness trackers as rewards for hitting sales goals. They're one of the most popular gifts right now with both health and non-health conscious workers. And once an employee earns it, they'll likely start using it. With health care costs at less than a third of national averages for companies with wellness programs, you get a double win – more productivity, less cost. One way to get the most out of fitness trackers for your team is to set sleeping goals. The journal Sleep reports that people who get seven to eight hours of sleep per night stay home sick four to nine days less than those who get less than five or more than 10 hours per night.

-Business2Community.com

## Finally, you can block snoops with this new Facebook Messenger feature.

Secret Conversations allows you to encrypt messages so nobody but you and your conversation partner can read them. It also lets you send messages with an expiration time ranging from five seconds to one day. Your Messenger app may not have notified you, but when you update it, you'll find the Secret Conversations option on the top right of each new message screen. You'll need to enable it manually for every conversation. The only way to use Secret Conversations, however, is to update your Messenger app – so if you haven't done it yet, DO IT, and use it. Otherwise you may be letting snooping competitors or hackers in on your conversations.

-Wired

