

# CST TECHNOLOGY TIMES

Insider Tips To Make Your Business Run Faster, Easier And More Profitably

## "passionate NOT pushy"

By Lisa Brown, CEO & Founder

Who's excited to start a new year? THIS GIRL...that's who! I have been told (on more than one occasion) that I am pretty PASSIONATE about technology and I am hoping that throughout the years, you have learned that it truly is passion and not me being pushy.....hence the "passionate NOT pushy" motto I was given by a client and have since adopted. I am also not the kind of person who likes to toot her own horn – or my company's for that matter even though we do amazing things every day!

But 2024 is going to change all of that! We are going to begin to shout it to the world just how awesome we are. Don't think of it as bragging. Think of it more as setting the standards.

I have spent the last 23 years educating clients (and small businesses in general) about their technology and what they deserve to have as a small business. Let me tell you, your expectations are too low! Society in general has accepted a significant drop in service levels. We expect to get an answering machine, be transferred a minimum of four times and then we might talk to a person who may or may not be able to help. Why should we expect to self-checkout even though prices are increasing? Very few companies answer their phones live and we expect to be put on hold!

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## A "CULTURE OF APPRECIATION" IMPROVES WORK AND CUSTOMER LOYALTY:

Here's How To Make It Your Own

The desire to feel valued, recognized and appreciated is universal in Western culture, not only in our personal lives but also in the workplace. According to Great Place To Work's 2023 discretionary effort study, 37% of respondents said that more recognition at work "would encourage them to produce better work more often." Additionally, employees who feel consistently recognized are 2.2X more likely to innovate and bring up new ideas and 2X more likely to say people at work go above and beyond. Working harder, smarter and happier – that's a significant ROI.

Similarly, customer appreciation drives loyalty, engagement and company growth. A Forrester survey of 85,000 consumers found that the top three emotions that "inspire or discourage loyalty" among people are to feel valued, appreciated and respected. Appreciation isn't a one-and-done event.

We can all agree that appreciation is important, but how you show it matters. (Sorry, but your annual Christmas party or Facebook customer appreciation post doesn't cover it.) To reap the benefits of appreciation in your organization, you must weave it into company culture.

### Tips To Create A Culture Of Appreciation

A culture of appreciation is about being consistent. While significant events like anniversaries, birthdays and holidays are great opportunities to recognize and appreciate employees and customers, you need to do it in small ways throughout the year.

Here are a few important tips to help you create your own meaningful culture of appreciation...

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**CST Group Inc.**

*This monthly publication is provided courtesy of Shawn & Lisa Brown, Owners.*



### OUR MISSION:

**CST Group Inc. is a PROACTIVE technology management firm that specializes in helping compliance-driven industries to SECURE, PROTECT and MANAGE their technology.**

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### Tips for meaningful employee appreciation and recognition:

It's important to note that there is a difference between appreciation and recognition.

Appreciating an employee is to acknowledge their value as a person to your organization. Recognition is related to performance and effort. Consider both when you are planning your acts of thanks:

- **Find out what's meaningful to them.** Everyone has preferences for how they want to be appreciated. So ask! Food, a note, a personalized gift – there are many simple ways to show appreciation.
- **Create more opportunities for recognition.** You can't see everything, so ask for submissions from your entire team and post the shout-outs on an office bulletin board or internal team e-mail.
- **Be specific.** Did they put in extra effort for the presentation? Are they always on time for team calls? Specific comments are more genuine.
- **Don't wait.** Don't recognize an employee for their work on a presentation a month

after the conference. The sooner you say it, the more impact it will have.

- **Align with the bigger vision.** Recognize how employees contribute to your organization's mission during team meetings. You could even offer to pay for a training course or industry conference to invest in their professional growth.

### Appreciating Customers:

In a study by the Rockefeller Corporation, 82% of customers will stop doing business with you if they feel they're undervalued. Here are tips for creating a culture of customer appreciation in your organization:

- **Personalize their experience.** A handwritten thank-you note is meaningful to customers, but personalizing the customer experience can go even further. Figure out how they like to be reached (via e-mail or phone, for example) or set up marketing campaigns relevant to their unique preferences.
- **Follow up.** After a service or purchase, check in with your customer to ensure they're happy. Proactively showing up and addressing questions or problems before

customers get frustrated helps them feel valued and respected.

- **Create loyalty programs.** Programs (like Starbucks' Rewards or REI's co-op membership) where customers earn points for purchases or get discounts for loyalty milestones help express how important their business is to you, ensuring you keep getting it!
- **Offer perks or gifts (especially when something goes wrong).** Customers love getting perks on their birthdays, on holidays, as a surprise or to celebrate a significant purchase from you. But gifts like a free product, gift card or discounts are essential if there's a problem. Once solved, gifts provide a way to recognize and rectify the inconvenience.

Infusing appreciation and recognition into your organization isn't just a pleasant gesture – it's a strategic move that yields tangible results like improved employee effort and innovation, stronger relationships and loyalty.

Whether acknowledging an employee's hard work or sending a personalized note to a customer, let's make every interaction a testament to our appreciation and respect for them – not just this month, but all year-round.

## "FREE UP COMING WEBINAR"

Join Lisa and Jerry Manor with SeaComm Federal Credit Union  
for a 30-minute LIVE webinar on:

**"Secure Your Finances: Cybersecurity Guidelines to Uncover Vulnerabilities to Safeguard Your Business!"**

**Wednesday, January 17, 2024  
at 10:00 am**

### During This Seminar You'll Discover:

- What criteria to consider in safeguarding your accounts.
- What are breaches costing us?
- Insights offered by Jerry Manor, representing the financial industry, his extensive expertise and experience makes it valuable to heed his perspective.

**For The Full Details And To Register, Go Online To:  
[www.cstsupport.com/webinar](http://www.cstsupport.com/webinar)**





# START JANUARY WITH A CHAMPION'S VISION:

## Emmitt Smith's Humble Advice For Success

When former NFL running back Emmitt Smith was six years old, he told his dad that one day he wanted to play for the Dallas Cowboys. "He said, 'Son, life is gonna do some things, and you're going to have to learn how to overcome,'" Smith recalls. He did overcome challenges, setbacks and mistakes in his career, lessons he took to heart. By embracing humility, accountability and passion for the process, he didn't simply succeed – he became legendary.

After 15 seasons in the NFL, and holding the record for leading rusher, Smith won season three of the hit show *Dancing With The Stars* and is today a successful real-estate entrepreneur. Though his accomplishments may feel like the stuff of dreams to us, his advice remains remarkably grounded.

January is often when we contemplate our goals and visions, whether in business or personal endeavors. By embracing Smith's advice, we can realize our own meaningful aspirations.

### Hold Yourself Accountable

Smith has had many coaches, teammates and other entrepreneurs challenge him in his career, and they've played a critical role in holding him accountable both as an individual and as part of a team. "Who made the most mistakes and who did not? What marketing plan is working, which one is not, who's not communicating upstream or downstream? All these things are important to the level of success you're trying to get to," Smith explains.

Accountability helps you improve, especially if you surround yourself with people who are more experienced. "It's a beautiful thing to have wisdom... Some of your accountability partners have a little bit more experience than you do, so never be afraid to ask and seek guidance and help."

### You Do Not Become Successful By Yourself

"I could not have become the all-time leading rusher without the Great Wall of Dallas in front of me," Smith says. It takes everybody to succeed in every organization; nobody can shoulder all the weight by themselves. The people who are not the most recognizable in the organization are often the ones who are doing a lot of the grunt work behind the scenes to make you look good. "Success is there to be shared. Not reserved for just you. It's enjoyable when you have others to share it with," Smith says.

### Be In It For The Process

People often ask Smith how he became an all-time leading rusher. "Well, you got to be consistent. So, you can't be missing work. There aren't any shortcuts in life," he says. Fulfilling a vision is about taking small steps consistently so actions become habits and habits become sustainable routines.

"At the end of the day, when you get done, you will look up and you will look back on your journey. And you will see the process. And the things you put in to become successful work out for your good."

## SHINY NEW GADGET OF THE MONTH

### Theralite Aura Bright Light Therapy Lamp



Proven by science to help boost your mood in the winter months or decrease the side effects of jet lag, light therapy lamps – also called SAD lamps – use LED lights to mimic natural sunlight to help regulate your mood and sleep-wake cycle.

Featured in the Strategist's "9 Very Best SAD Lamps," the Theralite Aura Bright Light Therapy Lamp is a standout choice. With 10,000 lux LED lights, it delivers the ideal light intensity for therapy. Plus, it's compact and versatile, fitting perfectly on your desktop, table or nightstand. It's affordable too – only \$52 on Amazon. Brighten any winter day with the Theralite Aura Bright Light Therapy Lamp.

## CARTOON OF THE MONTH





(Continued from cover - "passionate NOT pushy")

All of these scenarios make my head and heart hurt - AND....WE DESERVE BETTER – YOU....DESERVE BETTER!

So, I am declaring a new motto for CST – our focus for 2024: **EDUCATE 1000 BUSINESSES ON HOW THEIR TECHNOLOGY IS IMPACTING THEIR BOTTOM LINE AND EDUCATE THEM ON MAKING BETTER TECHNOLOGY DECISIONS.**

In the next 12 months, you will hear about all the services we are adding that will help our clients become more efficient all while watching the bottom line. We will be deploying our VOIP services so you will get our exceptional services for your phones as well. Our Risk Assessments and Penetration Tests are available to meet compliance needs and as I mentioned earlier, education! With the continuation of our monthly webinars, we will also be doing training videos, in-person events and Office Suite training.

2024 is the year to set ourselves apart from the normalization of bad customer service. CST will ensure our customers get a real person answering the phone for a quick resolution to your problems. We will continue to improve our service offerings and stay up to date with compliance guidelines. We will always be available for consulting BEFORE you make bad decisions and spend way too much time and money and we hope to prevent you from signing contracts that force you to do business with a vendor providing mediocre service.

Let's make 2024 an incredible year of growth.

Cheers Everyone!

As Always,  
"passionate NOT pushy"

Lisa

2024  
Happy New Year

# PASSKEYS: THE BEGINNING OF THE END OF PASSWORDS

In May, Google began rolling out passkeys, calling them "the beginning of the end of the password." Passwords have been with us since the mid-1960s, decades before computers became mainstream. But with more sophisticated cybercrime attacks, dated password technology does us more harm than good.

According to a survey by [AllAboutCookies](#), 84% of people still use unsafe passwords (like birthdays and pet names), and over half of survey respondents admitted having five or fewer passwords for all their accounts. Sure, we could do better. But these stats are also a testament to how annoying and ineffective passwords are. Google and other major players in the industry believe that passkeys are the "key" to a simpler – and safer – future.

## What Is A Passkey?

Instead of relying on something you remember (like a password), digital passkeys rely on something you have (like a device) or something you are (like a fingerprint or face recognition) for secure authentication.

## Here's How Passkeys Work

Passkeys use public-key cryptography. This is how it works: Your device has a pair of keys, a public key and a private key. The public key is shared with whatever website or app you want to access. The private key is stored securely on your device ONLY.

When you try to sign into a site, the site sends your device a digital "challenge" to check if it's really you. The website uses your public key to send a challenge back to your device. Your device then uses the private key stored on it to

decrypt and read the challenge – think of it like a decoder ring. The challenge confirms who the user is and sends a message back to the application. If the authentication is successful – i.e., the keys match – the website knows the response truly came from your device. It's like a secret handshake between your devices and the sites you use. This way, a hacker cannot log into your accounts without the private key from your device. This provides an added layer of security compared to passwords.

## Try It Out With Google!

If you have a Google account, you can try out passkeys for yourself.

1. Go to [g.co/passkeys](https://g.co/passkeys).
2. Click "Get passkeys" and sign in.
3. Choose "Use passkeys," then follow the prompts!

**Note:** *Passkeys are automatically created for Google devices, but you must be set up separately for other devices.*

## Why Passkeys Are Better

If you use a passkey, a hacker must have your device (and be logged in), fingerprint or face to log in. Also, passkeys are encrypted on your device instead of on servers, so even if your company's data is breached, they can't access your passkey.

Because companies like Google, Microsoft, Apple and Amazon are already using passkeys, this is sure to be the future of authentication. It will take time for other sites and companies to get on board. Continue to use strong, secure passwords in the meantime and store them in a password manager.

## NEW YEAR, NEW US - AM I RIGHT?

Well I don't know if we need to completely change ourselves but it is never a bad idea to try and better ourselves. There is always room for improvement no matter how "perfect" you think you are. I think 2024 should be our selfish year. Focus on yourself! Try integrating some habits in your day that helps you focus on YOU! Maybe that's setting aside reading time, a little self-care or try something new.

Lets start 2024 slow. Instead of jumping into goals or resolutions that you will quit 2 weeks in, and we know we all give up quick, instead, slowly integrate those goals so you can adjust and really hold onto what you want to accomplish. Remember just wishing for things is not enough, you must put the work in too!

Cheers to an amazing 2024!

=Jessica=