

Insider Tips to Make Your Business Run Faster, Easier and More Profitably

## Tech Talk With Lisa

**How do you know?** How do you know your data is secure? Your network? Your email? How do you confirm you are communicating with who you think you are? How do you know your business is secure? Your medical records? Your financial records? Even your home? Did you leave a window unlocked? A door? Is there an access point that is vulnerable? How do you know?

With the advancement of AI, how do you know your proactive security measures are in place, and how do you know if vulnerabilities remain?

Shawn and I are rarely apart. We work together, play together, travel together. But once in a while we split up, and this time Shawn went on a golf getaway with friends. That left me at our Florida home by myself. I am comfortable on my own. I protect our home and our dog. I have a checklist, and every night I run through it for peace of mind.

Still, it made me think. How do I know the house is as secure as it can be before I go to sleep? Have I done enough? Did I miss something?

With a physical threat, the risk is lower for most of us. Someone would need to be in my neighborhood, take a risk they cannot predict, and decide it is worth it. The odds matter, even if our routines still bring comfort. The Bureau of Justice Statistics reports in 2022, an estimate of about 5,200 burglary or trespassing victimizations per day in the U.S., based on the National Crime Victimization Survey. (Source: BJS, Criminal Victimization 2022 report.)

Cont. On Page 7



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 who's mission it to SECURE, PROTECT and MANAGE technology for Small to Medium Businesses like yours.**

# WHY MOST BUSINESS TECH IMPROVEMENTS FAIL

## AND WHAT ACTUALLY WORKS

Every business eventually hits that moment where someone says, "It's time to finally get our tech under control." And then real life shows up. A client emergency pops up. Someone can't access the file they needed five minutes ago. Good intentions slide quietly behind whatever fire needs putting out.

Here's the uncomfortable truth: Most tech improvement efforts fail because they rely on willpower instead of systems.

### Why People Quit (In Business and Fitness)

The fitness world has studied this for decades. People don't give up on goals because they're lazy — they give up because the structure around the goal is weak. Failure points are almost always the same:

- **Vague goals:** "Get in shape" is as unhelpful as "fix our IT."
- **No accountability:** If no one tracks progress, skipping becomes normal.
- **No expertise:** When you don't know what works, you guess and guess wrong.
- **Going it alone:** Motivation fades, crisis mode takes over.

Sound familiar?

### The Tech Version of the Same Problem

Most companies carry unresolved tech issues for months or years:

- "We should improve our backups."
- "Our security probably needs attention."
- "Everything feels slow."
- "We'll get to it when things calm down."

(Spoiler: they rarely do.)

These problems linger because leaders lack time, structure and expertise to make meaningful improvements.

What Actually Works:

### The Personal Trainer Model

People who succeed in fitness often work with a personal trainer because the system does the heavy lifting.

A great IT partner works the same way, providing:

- Built-in expertise
- Accountability that isn't on your shoulders
- Consistency even when you're busy
- Proactive problem-solving that prevents emergencies

### What This Looks Like in Real Life

Imagine a 25-person company where nothing is broken, but everything is mildly frustrating — slow laptops, random outages, constant "Does anyone know how this works?" moments.

Once they brought in an IT service provider, everything changed:

- Backups tested and fixed.
- Devices upgraded on a replacement cycle.
- Security gaps closed.
- Productivity soared because systems finally worked.

None of it required the owner to become a tech expert.

### The One Decision That Changes Everything

If you choose one tech goal this year, make it this: Stop operating in firefighting mode.

When tech becomes predictable instead of chaotic:

- Your team works faster
- Customers get better service
- You stop losing hours to preventable issues
- Growth becomes easier

This isn't about doing more. It's about making tech reliable and not doing it alone.

# 6 TECH HABITS

## YOUR BUSINESS SHOULD QUIT COLD TURKEY



Every business has a list of habits everyone knows aren't great. The risky shortcuts, the "we'll fix it later" processes, the workarounds that are just "how we do things."

They feel harmless until the day they aren't. If you want your systems to run smoother, safer and with fewer surprises, these are six tech habits worth quitting cold turkey and what to do instead.

### Habit #1: Clicking "Remind Me Later" on Updates

That tiny button has caused more business damage than most cybercriminals. Updates patch known vulnerabilities that attackers actively exploit. "Later" becomes weeks or months, leaving your systems exposed. Massive ransomware outbreaks in the past spread because businesses skipped available patches.

**Quit it:** Schedule updates after hours or let your IT partner push them automatically. No interruptions, no exposed systems.

### Habit #2: Using the Same Password Everywhere

Your favorite "strong" password isn't strong if it's used across multiple accounts.

When even a small website gets breached, your credentials get sold and attackers try them across banking, email and business systems. This is called credential stuffing, and it works shockingly well.

**Quit it:** Use a password manager (e.g. 1Password,

Bitwarden, LastPass). One master password. Unique credentials for everything else. Done.

### Habit #3: Sharing Passwords Over Email, Text or Slack

"Can you send me the login?" Sure. Now that password gets permanently stored in inboxes, backups, search histories and servers.

If anyone's account gets compromised, hackers can search for "password" and harvest everything.

**Quit it:** Use the secure sharing features built into password managers. No passwords in writing, no permanent trail.

### Habit #4: Giving Everyone Admin Access Because It's Easier

One person needs to install something, so you just grant admin access and never take it back. Now, half the team can bypass security tools, delete folders or install risky software. If any of those accounts get compromised, attackers instantly gain full control.

**Quit it:** Use the principle of least privilege. People get the exact access they need, nothing more.

### Habit #5: Workarounds That Became Permanent

A process broke, you found a workaround and now it's the "official" way. Workarounds cost time, create fragility and depend on employees remembering a trick instead of relying on a real system.

**Quit it:** List every workaround your team uses. Then let an IT professional replace them with proper solutions that save hours and eliminate frustration.

### Habit #6: The One Spreadsheet Running Your Entire Business

One Excel file with 12 tabs and mystical formulas known only to a few people is not a business system: it's a single point of failure. If it becomes corrupt or the creator leaves, your operations grind to a halt.

**Quit it:** Document what the spreadsheet actually does and then move those functions into real tools with backups, permissions, audit trails and scalability.

### Why These Habits Stick and How to Break Them

You don't keep these habits because you're careless. You keep them because you're busy. Bad tech habits feel fast in the moment, but the consequences stay invisible until they're catastrophic. The businesses that finally fix these issues don't rely on willpower; they change their environment.

#### With the right IT partner:

- Password managers get deployed company-wide
- Updates happen automatically
- Permissions get managed correctly
- Workarounds disappear
- Critical spreadsheets become real systems

The right way becomes the easy way.



# YOUR BUSINESS TECH

IS OVERDUE FOR AN ANNUAL PHYSICAL

Most people avoid medical appointments until something hurts. Businesses do the same with their technology. Systems are “fine,” nothing seems broken and everyone is busy. But just like your health, the absence of pain doesn’t mean everything is healthy. Problems that take businesses down are usually invisible until they explode.

So, here’s the uncomfortable question: When was the last time your business technology had a real checkup?

Not a printer fix. Not a new laptop. A holistic, preventative exam that looks for issues you don’t even realize are there. Because “working” and “healthy” are two very different things.

## The “I Feel Fine” Trap

Tech problems rarely announce themselves. Systems can run day after day while hiding critical risks, including:

- Backups that exist but don’t restore
- Aging hardware long past safe use
- User access no one has audited in years
- Security gaps nobody realized were there
- Compliance requirements silently going unmet

Your technology can look functional right up until one bad day becomes the worst day your business ever has.

## What a Real Tech Physical Examines

A proper technology assessment works the way a medical physical does: systematic, thorough and designed to surface issues early.

## Backup and Recovery

This is the heartbeat of your technology environment.

- If everything else fails, can you recover?
- Are backups completing successfully, not just scheduled?
- When was the last time you tested them?
- If your server died Monday morning, how long would it take to be operational?

Most businesses only discover backups are broken during an emergency. That’s the worst moment to find out.

## Hardware and Infrastructure

Equipment ages quietly... until it doesn’t.

- How old are your servers, firewalls, switches and workstations?
- Is anything past manufacturer support, meaning no patches or security updates?
- Are you replacing devices proactively or waiting until they fail?

Downtime from aging hardware is a top hidden cost. Things run slowly for months, then suddenly stop.

## Access and Credentials

If you’re unsure who has access to what, you’re not alone, but you are at risk.

- Can you produce a current list of users?
- Are any former employees still active?
- Are shared accounts hiding who did what?

...continued on page 4

## SHINY NEW GADGET OF THE MONTH

### Ember Temperature Control Smart Mug 2

The Ember Mug 2 isn’t just a mug; it’s your best friend during long, busy meetings. Set your perfect temperature in the app and keep it steady for 90 minutes, so every sip stays warm. Hand-wash safe and fully submersible, it’s the ultimate upgrade for busy coffee lovers who love tech.



## TYLER’S TECH TRICKS

### DOES YOUR COMPUTER TAKE A LONG TIME TO START UP?

YOU MIGHT WANT TO CHECK TO SEE IF THERE ARE TOO MANY START UP APPS SLOWING IT DOWN.

- SIMPLY TYPE “START” IN YOUR WINDOWS SEARCH BAR AND CLICK “STARTUP APPS”
- THEN GO THROUGH AND TURN OFF ANY APPS THAT DON’T NEED TO OPEN WHEN YOU FIRST TURN ON YOUR COMPUTER.

PROGRAMS AND APPS LIKE SPOTIFY AND SKYPE CAN BE TURNED OFF AT START UP, WHICH THEN FREES UP MEMORY ON YOUR COMPUTER RESULTING IN A FASTER EXPERIENCE.

REMEMBER, YOU CAN ALWAYS CALL THE OFFICE IF YOU NEED ASSISTANCE. WE’D BE HAPPY TO TAKE CARE OF THIS FOR YOU.



## FREE REPORT

### 12 Little-Known Facts Every Business Owner Must Know About Data Backup And Disaster Recovery

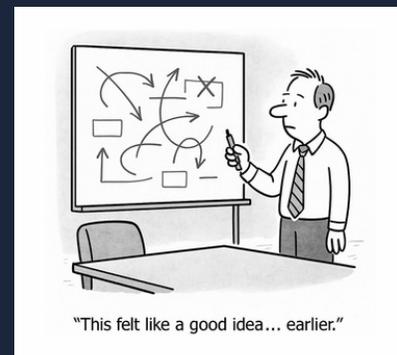
#### Download this ebook to discover:

- The only way to know for SURE your data can be recovered if lost, corrupted or deleted – yet fewer than 10% of businesses have this in place.
- Seven things you should absolutely demand from any off-site backup service.
- Where many backups fail and give you a false sense of security.
- The #1 cause of data loss that businesses don't even think about until their data is erased.



Claim your **FREE** copy today at <https://www.cstsupport.com/protect>

## CARTOON OF THE MONTH



...continued from page 3

Access creep happens silently over time. It's one of the most common and preventable causes of breaches.

#### Disaster Readiness

Nobody wants to think about the worst-case scenario, but ignoring it makes it dangerous.

- If ransomware hit, what's the real recovery plan?
- Is it written? Tested? Known by more than one person?
- How long could operations function without systems?

If your disaster plan amounts to "we'll figure it out," that's not a plan.

#### Compliance and Industry Requirements

Depending on your industry, "healthy" has a very specific definition.

- Healthcare businesses must meet HIPAA requirements.
- Anyone handling credit cards must pass PCI compliance.

- Many client contracts now include explicit cybersecurity requirements.

Compliance isn't about paperwork. It protects you from fines, lost contracts and legal exposure.

#### Warning Signs You're Overdue

If any of this is familiar, it's time for an exam:

- "I think our backups are working."
- "The server is old, but it still runs."
- "We probably have ex-employee accounts still active."
- "We have a disaster plan... somewhere."
- "If this person left, we'd be in trouble."
- "We'd probably fail an audit, but nobody has asked yet."

These aren't small issues. They're symptoms of risk.

#### The Cost of Skipping the Checkup

A preventative review costs hours. A failure costs days or weeks.

- **Data loss:** Losing client records, financials or projects can be fatal for a small business.

- **Downtime:** Every hour of downtime means lost productivity, missed deadlines and strained client trust.
- **Compliance failures:** Penalties are steep and increasingly enforced.
- **Ransomware:** The average small-business recovery cost is now deep into six figures.

Prevention is quiet and inexpensive. Recovery is loud and expensive

#### Why You Can't Perform Your Own Tech Physical

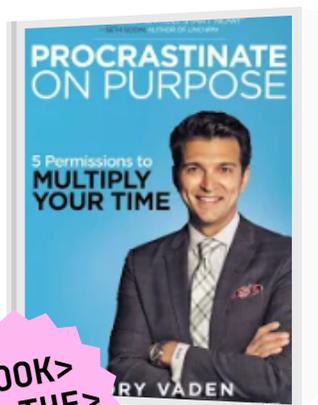
You wouldn't diagnose yourself with a guess and a stethoscope. You go to a professional who knows what healthy looks like.

Technology is no different. You need someone who:

- Knows the standards for your size and industry
- Recognizes patterns and warning signs
- Can see issues you've normalized simply by living with them daily

That's what transforms tech management from firefighting into prevention.

Passionate  
**NOT**  
Pushy  
WITH LISA BROWN



<BOOK>  
<OF\_THE>  
<MONTH>

#### WHAT I'M READING....

#### "PROCRASTINATE ON PURPOSE" BY RORY VADEN

I had the pleasure of meeting Rory at an industry event a few years back. His insight on time management was inspiring which prompted me to read this book.

In Procrastinate on Purpose, Rory explains how to stop trying to do everything and start focusing on what creates the highest return. He introduces the "Focus Funnel," a practical way to decide what to eliminate, automate, delegate, and defer so you protect time for your most important work. It is a strong read for leaders who feel overloaded and want a clear system to prioritize with confidence.

## CONFIDENT COMMUNICATION WITHOUT FORCE

If you have ever walked away from a meeting thinking, I should have said more, you are not alone. Many leaders hold back because they do not want to sound pushy. Considering I have a reputation for this, I am more cautious than most. Others overcorrect and push too hard because they feel time pressure, budget pressure, or public scrutiny.

There is a better path. You can communicate with clarity and strength without forcing agreement. You can protect relationships while still moving decisions forward and it doesn't have to be hard.

Here is the core idea. Being "not pushy" does not mean being quiet. It means you **stay firm on the goal** and **flexible on the path**.

#### A simple way to lead with confidence

Use this three-part structure when you need alignment.

- **State the outcome.** What you need to be true.
- **State the constraint.** Time, risk, budget, compliance, capacity.
- **Offer two paths.** Two clear options that both move things forward. This allows for accountability.

Example:

- "The outcome is to complete the project by March 1. The constraint is we cannot accept downtime. We can either phase it over two weekends or run it after-hours for two weeks. Which option works best for operations."

This approach lowers friction. It makes the decision easier and it shows you came prepared.

#### Three practical moves that reduce conflict

I have attended hundreds of meetings and one of the biggest issues I see is not the actual content of the conversation, but the tone people use. These small shifts will change the tone of a conversation fast.

- **Replace vague language with clear requests.**

Say: "I need a decision by Friday at 3 pm."  
Not: "Let me know soon."

- **Name the risk without drama.**

Say: "If we delay patching, we increase the likelihood of an incident."  
Not: "We are going to get hacked."

- **Use accountability that keeps dignity intact.**

Say: "Who owns the next step, and when should we reconvene."  
Not: "Why is this not done yet."

Five phrases you can use right away  
A few minor changes in what you ask makes a huge difference. These phrases will keep your tone respectful while still holding the line.

- "Here is what I recommend, and here is why."
- "What would prevent us from moving forward today?"
- "I hear your concern. Here are two options that address it."
- "Let's be clear on the decision, the owner, and the deadline."
- "If we do nothing, here is the likely impact."

When communication breaks down

A conversation can go wrong very, very quickly so if a conversation starts looping, step out of the loop. Do not argue. Do not overexplain. Reset the frame.

Try this:

- "It sounds like we are not aligned yet. Let's confirm the goal first, then choose the next step."

Then ask one question:

- "What does success look like from your perspective?"

This keeps the conversation productive. It also helps you uncover the real issue, which often is risk, time, or fear of change.

Your February challenge

This month, pick one relationship where you need better communication. **(A client.**

**A vendor. A board member. A department head. A co-worker, A partner.)**

Then do two things:

- Use the outcome, constraint, two paths structure once.
- Use one of the five phrases above in a real meeting or email.

Oh, let me mention email communication. Honestly, it is the worst when working on problem solving because many of the important "in person" communication signals are missing. My recommendation, never communicate problem solely on electronic forms of communication (including Teams, Slack, etc.) and certainly never engage in conflict using those communication methods.

Understand, you do not need to be louder to be effective. You need to be clearer.

Passionate not pushy means you lead with confidence, protect trust, and move decisions forward. I am practicing this right alongside you, one conversation at a time. If you try it this month, I'd love to hear what changed for you.

Email me at [lisa@cstsupport.com](mailto:lisa@cstsupport.com)

Lisa



Subscribe Here



# Risk Assessment?

Your Digital Security Should Be A Non-Negotiable!



Annual and quarterly risk assessments are not optional for compliance focused industries. They are required to stay aligned with regulatory standards, protect sensitive data and reduce liability. Even if your business is not bound by compliance rules, regular risk assessments are one of the most effective ways to understand your exposure to a cyber-attack. They identify gaps, measure vulnerabilities and give you a clear roadmap to strengthen your security posture before an incident occurs. Every business benefits from knowing its true level of risk.

If you are looking for an Annual or Quarterly Risk Assessment, CST offers a 3<sup>rd</sup> party perspective to your security posture. To learn more, call 518-483-4100 and ask for Lisa.

In this episode of the Passionate NOT Pushy Podcast, host Lisa Brown sits down with Ashley Utter, owner of Greenscape Innovations, a family-owned sod and landscaping company serving Arcadia and Port Charlotte, Florida.

Ashley shares her journey stepping into sole ownership, leading with integrity, and growing a values-driven business rooted in family, quality, hard work, and community commitment. From expanding services to opening a garden center, Ashley explains how purpose-led leadership and customer experience fuel sustainable growth.

This conversation is for women entrepreneurs, business owners, and leaders who believe success doesn't require pushing harder, just leading smarter and staying rooted in what matters.



## Love Your Business? Start With Security Awareness

Cybercriminals don't need to break down the door, they wait for someone to click. That's why security awareness training is one of the most powerful ways to protect your organization. Your employees are your first line of defense. When your team understands how to recognize phishing emails, suspicious links, and social engineering tactics, cyber threats can be stopped before they become costly incidents.

This Valentine's Day, show your business some love by investing in education. Proactive training builds confidence, reduces risk, and creates a culture where cybersecurity is everyone's responsibility, not just IT's.

Because the best protection isn't reactive... it's informed, prepared, and preventative.

**Show your business some love this Valentine's Day.**

**Contact Jessica at 518-483-4100 to schedule security awareness training.**



Cont. From Page 1

Business risk is different. Cyber risk does not require someone to be near you. It does not require them to know you. It scales.

One global data point makes that real. Check Point reported that in Q1 2025, organizations experienced an average of 1,925 cyber attacks per week per organization. That is about 275 attacks per day per organization. (Source: Check Point Q1 2025 Global Cyber Attack Report.)

I recently spoke with a business owner who shared an incident that nearly put his company out of business. He believed he had done everything right, but there was a gap. Firewall updates that never happened. Something he never thought to ask about. How could he know if it never crossed his mind.

That is the challenge with protecting your business, and the information you hold for customers, clients, and your community. You do not know what you do not know. So, you do not always know what to ask. This is also where trust comes in. You trust your IT advisor. You should. But trust should come with proof.

I work in IT, and I am willing to prove what is in place, what is working, and what still needs attention. Real discussions. Real data from your environment. Clear next steps. Cybersecurity works best when business owners and IT share responsibility.

So here are five questions you can ask your IT person or firm to get clarity and peace of mind.

- How are security updates and patches applied on our computers and network. How often does it happen, and how do you verify completion.
- What layered security controls are in place today. Firewall, endpoint protection, MFA, email security, network segmentation.
- What security awareness training do employees receive. How often. What format. How do you measure improvement.
- How are backups handled. How often do they run. Where are they stored. How often are restores tested.
- What vulnerability testing or risk assessments are performed. How often. What do we do with the results.

If you want to answer the “how do you know” question with confidence, request a Risk Assessment.

CST offers a limited number of Level 1 Risk Assessments at no cost. We assess three computers on your network to identify what a hacker could access if they gained entry. You receive a detailed report that shows risks and recommendations, so you can take action.

Risk assessments are also becoming a requirement for many businesses. If you want ongoing, deeper assessments, ask me about our CyberWatch Program. It focuses on real visibility and real action to strengthen security over time.

To request a no-cost Risk Assessment, contact Sara at sara@cstsupport.com or call 877-954-4100 to get on the schedule. Please do not wait – call today as we do have a limited number to offer each month.

Let’s make February the month you can answer “how do you know” with confidence.

Lisa

## Client of the Month

### GREENSCAPE INNOVATIONS ARCADIA, FLORIDA



**GREENSCAPE INNOVATIONS** GreenscapeInnovations.com 941-628-0012  
4435 Tamiami Trl. Port Charlotte | 11402 County Rd 769, Arcadia

We want to welcome our newest client, Greenscape Innovations in Arcadia (Lake Suzy), Florida.

Greenscape Innovations is a full-service sod and landscaping company and their Lake Suzy location is home to a full garden nursery and retail center offering sod, plant, pottery, soil, mulch, outdoor furniture and more for homeowners and businesses looking to upgrade their outdoor spaces. You will find quality products, expert guidance and a warm, family-friendly atmosphere.

What stands out most is their focus on relationships and community. Their mission centers on farm-fresh sod, quality landscaping and customer service. If you are looking to upgrade your outdoor space, contact them at 941-628-0012 or visit their website at [www.greenscapeinnovations.com](http://www.greenscapeinnovations.com)

# Your VOIP Solution Is Here!



## Empower your team to connect from anywhere and enhance customer satisfaction

Our easy-to-use phone system lets you:

- Make and receive calls from your computer, mobile phone, or web browser.
- See who is available, on a call, or away.
- Sync your contacts so everything stays up to date.
- Use multiple devices for one user - so your calls follow you wherever you go!

**Simple. Flexible. Reliable.**  
A phone system that works- wherever you do.



Contact Michelle at 877-954-4100  
And Explore What's Possible

Scan to Schedule a Demo!



## Hitting The Road With Sara & Mary



Sara and Mary recently represented I.T. For Local Government as vendors at the New York Association of Towns Newly Elected Town Officials (NETO) School, connecting with newly elected town leaders from across the state. This comprehensive program—co-sponsored by the Office of the State Comptroller, equips town officials with essential guidance on budgeting, fiscal responsibility, cash management, and retirement to support effective local governance.

During the event, Sara and Mary had the opportunity to meet town supervisors, board members, clerks, highway superintendents, and fiscal staff, sharing how I.T. For Local Government supports municipalities with reliable managed IT services, cybersecurity protection, compliance guidance, and responsive support tailored specifically for New York towns.

For towns without in-house IT staff—or those looking to strengthen security, improve efficiency, and stay compliant—we act as an extension of your team, so you can focus on serving your community with confidence.

If we didn't get a chance to meet you at NETO, we'd still love to connect.

Call Us Today 518-481-0055