

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

Tech Talk With Lisa

October is a special month in the Brown household.

Shawn and I celebrate our anniversary. We both celebrate our birthdays. CST celebrates its **26th anniversary**. And even Bella, our dog, has an October birthday!

With so much to celebrate, October always reminds me of the importance of taking time away. Whether it is a vacation, a long weekend, dinner with family, or simply closing the laptop at the end of the day, we all need time to disconnect from technology.

Unfortunately, cybercriminals don't disconnect when we do.

Your computer may be turned off. Your office may be closed. Your employees may be on vacation. But your email, network, cloud services, backups, firewalls, websites, and other systems are still operating. And the threats against them haven't gone anywhere.

In fact, downtime can create opportunities for cybercriminals.

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

THE 15-MINUTE MEETING EVERY LEADERSHIP TEAM SHOULD HAVE



If an unexpected disruption hit your business tomorrow, would you handle it with confidence?

Many businesses don't discover gaps in communication, decision-making and operational planning until they're responding to a disruption in real time.

As the year winds down, it's a good time to review your readiness.

Start by bringing your leadership team together for 15 minutes to answer these five questions.

1. If our business stopped operating tomorrow, what would need to be restored first?

Identify the functions your business can't operate without, such as scheduling, customer support, payment processing, order fulfillment or access to essential files.

Knowing what must be restored first helps your team focus on what matters most, rather than trying to fix everything at once.

2. Who makes decisions during a disruption?

Pressure quickly exposes unclear ownership.

When people don't know who can make the call, they wait for approval, duplicate work or create separate conversations that slow the resolution.

Your team should know who starts the response, updates employees, communicates with customers and works with vendors or IT partners.

3. How would we communicate without our usual tools?

Email, phones and collaboration platforms feel dependable until they stop working.

If employees couldn't access email, where would they find instructions? If your phone system failed, how would customers reach you? Where would leadership share updates?

A backup communication plan gives employees and customers a dependable place to turn.

4. What is our biggest operational dependency?

It may be a software platform, internet connection, third-party provider or an employee who understands a process nobody else fully knows.

Identifying these dependencies shows where documentation, testing, backup options or support may be needed.

5. What would we wish we had prepared?

Your team may wish it had documented a process, tested backups, updated contact lists or agreed on which systems should come back online first.

Preparation gives you room to respond instead of react.

Turn the answers into action

Answering these questions will show you where your plans are clear and where they still rely on assumptions.

It will reveal how your people, systems and processes need to work together during a disruption.

A good IT partner can turn gaps into action by testing recovery processes, checking backups and documenting what matters most. The result is a clearer plan your team can rely on when things don't go as expected.



4 WAYS TO GET MORE OUT OF YOUR TEAM

Businesses don't struggle because they lack great employees. They struggle because they don't understand how to make the most of the people they have. This results in smart, capable employees in the wrong roles, leading to frustration and unnecessary friction that comes across to leaders as incompetence.

Patrick Lencioni, bestselling author on business management, discusses in his latest book, *The 6 Types of Working Genius*, how every job uses a mix of six different skills. However, most people are wired to only handle a couple of the required skills. They're energized by the skills they have, which in turn make them productive. When employees aren't energized, they disengage.

Here's how to avoid performance pitfalls and get a better understanding of your team's strengths and weaknesses.

Hire for the work, not the title

When a role opens, most hiring managers default to a list of relevant experience, industry background and a resume that matches the job description. What they don't ask is what the role requires a person to do.

For example, a marketing role. Do you need someone to come up with bold new campaign ideas, someone who is great at sales leads or someone who can rally the team to meet deadlines?

According to Lencioni, most candidates will say they can do it all, but those jobs require different skill sets. So, the question becomes whether the role plays to the candidate's strengths or exposes their weaknesses. Does it increase productivity or create tension?

Get specific about what's expected of that role on a typical Tuesday, then hire for the person who finds that work energizing.

Look at your team before you look outside it

There's an instinct in business to fill every gap through hiring. If the team is struggling with follow-through, you might think of bringing in someone more detail-oriented. That instinct often reflects a gap in team awareness more than a gap in headcount.

Lencioni suggests mapping out what each person on your team does best. What work genuinely energizes them? One person's frustration could be another's best skill. Filling in a gap might just mean rearranging tasks among team members.

Underperformers may need change

Not every underperformer is the wrong person for your business. Sometimes they're just in the wrong role.

If you have someone who fits the culture, shares values and genuinely wants to contribute, letting them go isn't necessarily the right move.

Good people are written off every day because no one asks whether the role is the issue. Before you start an exit conversation, says Lencioni, ask why they are struggling. A new role might be what lets them do their best work. Moving someone into work that plays to their strengths costs less than replacing them.

Teamwork is your real competitive advantage

It doesn't matter if you have the best strategy, product or pricing, if your team isn't functioning well together, your business will never reach its true potential.

The most overlooked competitive advantage for a small business is how you use your team's strengths. When a team works with its strengths and understands its weaknesses, it stops working against itself.

If your business is struggling, instead of replacing good people, take a page from Lencioni's book. Look into better understanding how your team is wired, then build around it. The whole business will become easier to run.

5 OVERLOOKED BUSINESS HABITS THAT **SAVE** THE MOST TIME



If you're like most business owners, you're always looking for ways to save time. New software, AI tools and productivity systems all promise to help, but the businesses that run with the fewest interruptions usually have one thing in common: better habits.

The biggest time-savers aren't always the ones getting the most attention. They're the routines that prevent small problems from becoming expensive distractions.

As year-end approaches, it's a good time to revisit a few habits that can help you stay productive, reduce friction and avoid unnecessary fire drills.

1. Plan ahead instead of playing catch-up

If you wait until the end of the year to evaluate what's working, you're already playing catch-up. Well-run businesses set aside time to review priorities, discuss potential roadblocks and prepare for what's next. Those conversations don't need to be long, but they need to happen consistently.

Planning helps you react less, stay focused and raise concerns before they affect deadlines, customers or daily work.

A little planning today prevents a lot of scrambling tomorrow.

2. Document the important stuff

If your business depends on one person remembering how something works, you've created a single point of failure.

Processes, vendor contacts, key procedures and responsibilities should be easy to find, understand and share. Good documentation keeps work moving when someone's unavailable and reduces the time employees spend searching for answers.

Documentation doesn't need to cover every task. Start with approval steps, vendor contacts, recurring processes and responsibilities. When information lives in one person's head, work slows down. When it's documented, your team can move forward with confidence.

The less your team has to guess, the more time they can spend getting work done.

3. Fix small problems before they become big ones

Your business probably has a list of minor frustrations people have learned to work around. Maybe it's outdated software, an inefficient process, aging hardware or a task that takes too many steps. Because those issues aren't urgent, they're often pushed aside.

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SHINY NEW GADGET OF THE MONTH

A Mini PC That Earns Its Space

GEEKOM A9 Max 2026 puts desktop-level performance into a compact frame. It can power four displays, run demanding applications and support fast wired networks, while expandable memory and storage make upgrades simple. Its small size works in offices, home setups and mobile workspaces, giving teams a flexible machine that's easy to deploy and manage and doesn't crowd the desk.



FRED IS RETIRED

After years of adventures, road trips, and making memories alongside our team, Fred is officially retiring.

He's traded in the office for somewhere tropical, warm, and hopefully filled with plenty of sunshine.



While we'll miss seeing him around, we're grateful for all the memories he's been part of and we think he's more than earned this next chapter

Happy Retirement!!

Don't Let Your Review Disappear!

We're not afraid of ghosts... but we are afraid of your kind words disappearing into the night! 🎃

If CST Group has helped make your technology a little easier, your team a little more secure, or your day a little less stressful, we'd love to hear about it.

Take a minute to leave us a Google review.
Your feedback means so much to our team and it helps other businesses know who they can trust when IT gets a little spooky.



Leave Your Review Here:

<https://www.cstsupport.com/reviews/>

Thank you for trusting us with your technology.

We truly appreciate you!

Lisa Brown & the CST Group Team

CARTOON OF THE MONTH



"You must be the new remote employee."

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Efficient businesses take a different approach. They address small problems while they're manageable before they can cause larger disruptions.

A five-minute delay repeated across several employees every day can quickly add up. The same is true for slow systems, repeated errors and processes that create unnecessary back-and-forth. Small issues may seem harmless, but they rarely stay that way.

4. Test your plans instead of making assumptions

It's easy to make assumptions when everything seems to be working.

Resilient businesses replace assumptions with confidence. They verify backups, review recovery plans and walk through potential scenarios before they're forced to respond to one.

Testing doesn't need to be complicated.

It may mean confirming backups can be restored, checking emergency contact information or asking employees what they'd do if a key system became unavailable. For many businesses, preparedness becomes a priority only after something goes wrong. A quiet month is actually the best time to test your plans, before the pressure is real.

The time you spend preparing for a disruption is usually far less than the time you'd spend recovering from one.

5. Treat your IT provider like a strategic partner

If you talk to your IT provider only when something breaks, you are missing opportunities to prevent problems.

Successful businesses have regular conversations about goals, risks, future needs and business priorities. That allows technology decisions to support growth instead of reacting to problems after they happen.

A strong IT partner helps reinforce the habits that keep your business running efficiently. They can identify risks, recommend improvements, plan for future needs and provide support before an issue becomes an interruption.

The best technology relationships don't just solve problems. They also help prevent them.

Better habits create more time

Saving time isn't always about working faster or adding another tool. Often, it comes down to habits that reduce confusion, prevent delays and keep minor hiccups from turning into bigger ones.

Planning ahead, documenting information, addressing issues early and testing your plans can save hours of disruption later. With the right IT partner supporting those habits, your business can stay productive each day and focus on what matters most.

THREE MONTHS LEFT. WHAT WILL YOU DO WITH THEM?



October marks the beginning of the fourth quarter, which means we have just three months left in 2026.

That makes this a great time to look at the goals you set at the beginning of the year. What have you accomplished? What still needs attention? And, perhaps most importantly, what can realistically be completed before December 31?

For many organizations, this is also budget season. Decisions being made now will determine what projects, technology improvements, equipment replacements, cybersecurity initiatives, and other investments are possible in 2027.

Technology should be part of those conversations.

Take a look at your computers and infrastructure. Are there aging systems that should be replaced next year? Are your cybersecurity protections keeping pace with your organization? Are there projects you have continued to postpone? Are there technology expenses coming that should be included in the 2027 budget?

Planning now can help prevent unexpected expenses later.

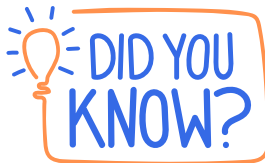
The fourth quarter is also a good time to review what worked this year and what didn't. Maybe a process needs improvement. Perhaps employees need additional training. Maybe there is a technology frustration everyone has simply learned to live with (FYI, we can't fix it if we don't know about it).

You still have three months to make progress.

Not everything has to be completed by December 31. Some of the best work you can do during the fourth quarter is simply deciding what comes next and creating a realistic plan for getting there.

Finish 2026 with purpose, build your 2027 budget with intention, and enter the new year knowing where you want to go.

Three months is plenty of time to make a difference.



You don't have to wait for a big IT problem to call us.

Something not working quite right? A computer acting strangely? Having trouble with an application, email, Wi-Fi, printer, or another technology issue? Maybe you received an email that doesn't look quite right, noticed something unusual on your computer, or simply have a technology question.

Reach out to us. That's what we're here for.

Sometimes the little things are worth investigating. An unusual pop-up could be nothing, or it could indicate a problem. A computer that suddenly slows down may need attention. An unexpected login notification or suspicious email should always be questioned. Even a small issue that keeps interrupting your work is worth a call.

And you don't have to limit those calls to troubleshooting.

Thinking about purchasing a new computer or piece of technology? Considering new software? Adding an employee? Changing how you work? Give us a call before making the change. We can help you think through how it will work with your existing technology, security, and business needs.

At CST, we want you to feel comfortable reaching out. There is no need to decide whether something is "important enough" to contact us. If you have a question, concern, or something simply doesn't seem right, let our team take a look.

See something strange? Have a technology question? Planning a change?

Call us at 877-954-4100 or email support@cstsupport.com. We're here to help.

A Little Appreciation Goes a Long Way

At CST Group, we truly value the relationships we've built with our clients, and we love any opportunity to visit, catch up, and say thank you in person.

Recently, members of our team made a few stops around the Plattsburgh area with apple cider and cider donuts from Rulfs Orchard as a small token of our appreciation.

These visits are about much more than dropping off a treat. They give us an opportunity to connect face-to-face, hear how things are going, and spend time with the people we work with throughout the year. Some of the best conversations happen when there isn't a support ticket to resolve, a project to complete, or a technology problem that needs immediate attention.

We also learn a lot by simply listening. Understanding what is happening within our clients' organizations, what has changed, and what they are planning for the future helps us be a better technology partner.

Our clients are more than businesses and organizations we serve. They are people we have built relationships with, and many are part of the same communities where we live and work.

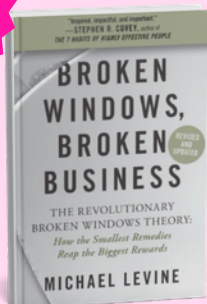
We'll continue making our way around to visit our clients because showing our gratitude and staying connected will always be important to us.

Follow us on Facebook to see where we visit next!!

<https://www.facebook.com/CSTGroupInc>



<BOOK>
<OF_THE>
<MONTH>



WHAT I'M READING

BROKEN WINDOWS, BROKEN BUSINESS BY MICHAEL LEVINE

Broken Windows, Broken Business explores how small, overlooked details can shape a customer's perception of an entire organization. Levine argues that minor issues, such as poor communication, inconsistent service, or neglected details, can signal larger problems.

The message is simple: pay attention to the little things. Strong businesses build trust by consistently addressing the "broken windows" before they become bigger problems.

Tech Talk With Lisa Cont.

When fewer people are watching, suspicious activity may go unnoticed longer. An employee checking email quickly from a phone may be less cautious about clicking a link.

Someone traveling may connect to an unsecured network. A fraudulent email requesting a payment or password reset may seem more believable when the person who would normally verify it is out of the office.

That is why cybersecurity cannot depend solely on someone sitting in front of a computer.

Good cybersecurity continues **24 hours a day, 7 days a week.**

Systems need to be monitored.

Backups need to run.

Security tools need to remain active.

Accounts need multifactor authentication.

Updates and patches need to happen.

And employees need to know what to do when something doesn't look right.

This is also why we talk so much about having layers of protection. No single security product can protect an organization from every threat. Technology, monitoring, backups, policies, employee education, and good processes all work together.

And there is another important piece: **planning for downtime before it happens.**

Before you leave for vacation, ask yourself: Who is watching the technology? Who will respond to a security alert? Does someone know what to do if a system goes down? Are backups working? Do employees know who to contact if they receive something suspicious?

These are questions every organization should be able to answer confidently.

For our CST clients, this is exactly why we put layers of protection, monitoring, backup, documentation, and support in place. Our job is to keep watch over the technology and security we manage, whether you are sitting at your desk, enjoying a weekend, celebrating with family, or finally taking that well-earned vacation.

You shouldn't have to spend your time away wondering if your backups ran, whether a security alert was missed, or who your employees should call when something goes wrong. That's our responsibility.

After 26 years in business, that remains one of our goals at CST. We want our clients to enjoy the birthdays, anniversaries, vacations, weekends, and important moments in life knowing someone is still paying attention to their technology.

And if you aren't a CST client, it is worth asking: Who is paying attention to yours when you're not?

So this October, Shawn and I plan to celebrate a few milestones, spend some time with family, probably spoil Bella a little more than necessary, and step away from our computers occasionally.

Because as much as I love what I do, the people I love and the memories we make together deserve my attention too.

So, take the time off. Just make sure your cybersecurity stays on the job.

Lisa

IS YOUR PHONE SYSTEM HAUNTED?

If your phones are stuck in the past, it might be time for a change.

With CST VoIP, your calls can follow you.

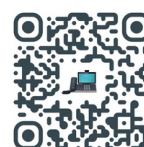
Whether you're at your desk, on your computer, or working from somewhere else. Plus, you get handy features like call transfer, conferencing, auto attendant and more.

Don't let an outdated phone system haunt you.

Call Michelle to book a demo and see what's possible!
877-954-4100



SCAN TO SCHEDULE A NOT SO SPOOKY DEMO!



26 YEARS LATER... I STILL DON'T LIKE SELLING

This October, CST celebrates 26 years in business.

Twenty-six years of technology changes. Twenty-six years of cybersecurity changes. Twenty-six years of working with businesses, organizations, and local governments. And after all that time, there is one part of owning a business I still don't particularly enjoy.

Selling.

I have never wanted CST to be the company that chases someone for a sale. I don't want to convince someone to buy something they don't need. And I certainly don't want to use fear to pressure someone into making a cybersecurity decision.

What I *am* passionate about is making sure people understand their risk.

There is a big difference.

When I sit down with a Business Owner, Town Supervisor, Board Member, or Decision-Maker, my goal is to help them understand what I see. Are their backups adequate? Are their employees protected? Is their email secure? Who owns and controls their technology? What happens if something goes wrong? Are there gaps they simply don't know about?

Sometimes those conversations lead to business for CST. Sometimes they don't.

And that's okay.

Over the years, I have spoken with organizations that already had a good IT relationship. I have encountered prospects who weren't ready to make a change or simply chose another provider.

I don't believe every one of those conversations needs to end with a sale to have value.

If someone walks away from a conversation with me asking better questions to their current IT provider, reviewing their backups, thinking differently about cybersecurity, or taking another look at how their technology is managed, then the conversation accomplished something.

Maybe that comes from the educator in me. I spent 11 years as a college adjunct instructor, and education remains a significant part of what we do today. I would much rather explain the *why* behind a recommendation than simply tell someone they need to buy it.

It is also why I personally stay involved in conversations with prospects. CST doesn't need to manufacture urgency. **Cybersecurity and technology risks are real enough on their own.** My responsibility is to explain those risks clearly, recommend what I believe the organization needs, and allow the people responsible for that organization to make an informed decision.

That doesn't mean I'm not persistent.

If I believe something is important, you're probably going to hear the passion in my voice. I may ask another question. I may challenge you to think about something differently. And, you will probably get a follow-up call.

But there is a point where passion can become pressure, and I try not to cross that line.

After 26 years, I have learned that you don't have to chase every opportunity. You don't have to win every proposal. And you don't have to turn every conversation into a customer.

You do have to believe in what you provide.

You have to be willing to educate people, even when there is nothing immediately in it for you. You have to tell people what they need to hear, not simply what will help you make a sale. And you have to be willing to respect their decision when the answer is no.

Maybe that's why **Passionate Not Pushy** became more than the name of my podcast. It describes how I want to do business.

Twenty-six years later, I still don't like selling.

But I absolutely love helping people make better decisions about their technology.

And I don't think I'll ever get tired of that.

Lisa