

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

Tech Talk With Lisa

Hard Work Still Matters. It Just Looks Different.

Every year on the first Monday in September, we celebrate Labor Day. For many of us, it marks the unofficial end of summer. It's a long weekend, one last cookout, and maybe a final chance to enjoy summer before fall schedules kick into full gear.

But Labor Day means much more than that.

Labor Day is a federal holiday dedicated to recognizing the contributions and achievements of American workers. Its roots go back to the labor movement of the late 1800s, during a time when many Americans worked long hours, often seven days a week, under difficult and sometimes dangerous conditions. The first Labor Day celebration took place in New York City in 1882, and in 1894, Labor Day became a federal holiday.

At its core, Labor Day...

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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 FIRE DRILL NO BUSINESS OWNER WANTS TO RUN



When a fire alarm goes off at a school, nobody stops to figure out what to do next. Students line up, teachers move them through the exits and everyone knows where they're supposed to go because they've done it before.

Your backup strategy should work the same way. But most businesses have never tested whether they can actually recover.

Why fire drills save lives and businesses

Fire drills do more than satisfy a policy. They prepare people before pressure sets in and answer one critical question: Will this work when we need it?

When everyone knows what to do, panic stays under control. If the plan fails, they discover it during the drill, not during a real emergency.

That is the value of practice. It removes guesswork before it matters.

The business version of a fire drill

Most businesses have backups. Far fewer have tested whether they'll work.

They don't find out until something goes wrong and they're scrambling to restore systems and get the business running again.

That's when the real cost begins.

What recovery testing looks like

Recovery testing is not theoretical. We restore from your backups, measure how long recovery takes and identify which systems come back first and where gaps exist.

The process answers questions every business should know before an outage:

- Will your backups restore successfully?
- How long will recovery take?
- Which systems should come back first?
- Can your team keep working during recovery?
- Are there gaps in your backup strategy?

That is the difference between having backups and being ready to recover.

What happens when you skip the drill

When recovery has never been tested, even a routine disruption can become a major business problem. Employees lose access to critical systems, customer service can't help customers, sales can't process orders and leadership is left waiting for answers.

The cost isn't just lost time. It's lost revenue, damaged customer trust and unnecessary disruption.

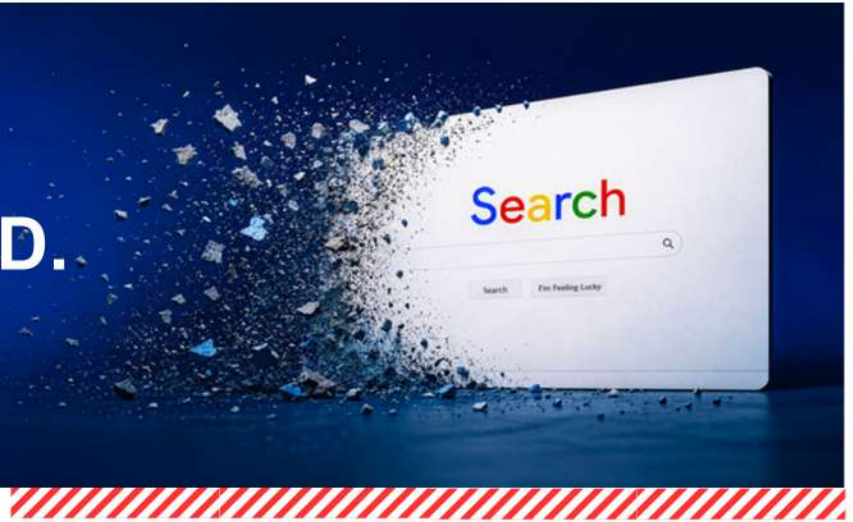
Don't wait for the emergency

Nobody runs a fire drill because they expect a fire tomorrow. They do it because an emergency is the worst time to discover the plan doesn't work.

Backup and recovery deserve the same preparation. If you haven't tested recovery, you're relying on assumptions. A controlled recovery test will tell you whether your plan is ready before you depend on it.

THE SEARCH ENGINE CHANGED.

Did Your Marketing?



Think about the last time you needed a quick recommendation.

Maybe your AC stopped working or maybe your kid needed a dentist. A few years ago, you probably would've Googled it, skimmed a few websites, compared reviews and maybe asked someone nearby for a second opinion. Now, more people are skipping that whole process.

They're asking AI tools the same way they'd ask a trusted friend. "Who should I call?" "Which one is reliable?" "Who won't overcharge me?" "What's the best option near me?"

When the answer comes back, many of them don't keep searching. They call the name they were given.

That's the shift small business owners need to understand. Search isn't just about showing up on Google anymore. It's about showing up in the AI-generated answer.

For years, a solid website and a strong Google Business Profile did the heavy lifting. A customer searched "plumber near me" or "bakery near me," got a page of blue links and started comparing. Your job was to climb to the top of that list and stay there. From there, your site carried the visitor toward a call or a booking.

That faucet is shutting off, without so much as a warning.

Consider the numbers. Most B2B buyers already turn to AI tools before they call a vendor. On the consumer side, most Google searches now end without a single click, meaning the AI tool answers the question and the search is over before anyone lands on a website.

AI doesn't always recommend businesses in the same order Google ranks them.

Businesses that never crack page one are getting named by AI tools anyway, while page-one veterans get skipped. Even worse, most people don't double-check what the AI tells them. They just go with it.

That means when a user asks which plumber, dentist or accountant to use, the AI is making the call almost by itself, without ever seeing your reviews, your storefront or your years of good work. If your name doesn't come up, you're invisible, wondering why the phone stopped ringing.

The businesses that win this shift will do it the old way. They'll become so clearly credible that both the algorithm and the human on the other end have no real choice but to point their way.

That kind of credibility comes from good service, strong results and proof people can actually verify.

What that looks like in practice

First, ask a friend to open their own ChatGPT and ask for the best business in your category near them. See if your name shows up. If it doesn't, treat that as a wake-up call.

Second, take stock of your real proof: case studies with numbers, reviews with full names attached, press mentions, awards, anything specific and verifiable. If that list is short, you have a credibility gap, not a marketing gap.

Third, pick one piece of proof and build it out this month. A short book of customer stories, a real review push or a well-written piece in your own voice. Publish it now. Fourth, lean into strategies that build trust in person: partnerships, local events, direct mail followed by a phone call, referral programs. These still move faster than anything online.

The old rules of search are gone. The only question left is whether the machine finds you or hands your next customer to the business down the street with a fraction of your experience and a better AI footprint.

THE 4 MOST EXPENSIVE BACKUP ASSUMPTIONS BUSINESSES MAKE



Mike Tyson once said, "Everyone has a plan until they get punched in the mouth."

In business, that punch usually comes in the form of a disruption you assumed you were ready for. It might be a failed backup, an unexpected outage or a security incident that exposes a weakness nobody knew existed.

That's the thing about assumptions. They feel like facts until they're tested.

Here are four that regularly catch businesses off guard.

Assumption #1: 'We're backed up'

Having an untested backup is like carrying a spare tire in your trunk and finding out it's flat when you're stranded on the side of the road.

Most businesses know backups exist. They've seen the reports, the notifications and the green checkmarks. However, only a few can confidently say when they last tested a restore, how long recovery would take or whether every critical application and file is included.

A backup proves its value only when it helps you recover. The most dangerous backup is the one you've never tested. Until you've restored from it successfully, you're relying on hope, not proof.

Assumption #2: 'Someone would tell us if there was a problem'

You can spend big bucks on the latest monitoring tool that's really good at catching problems fast and alerting you immediately. Confusing detection with protection is an assumption that costs businesses money.

A weather alert can tell you a hurricane is coming. It doesn't board up your windows or move your family to safety. The alert is useful only if you know what to do next.

Your monitoring tool works the same way. It tells you something is wrong. What happens after that alert goes off is up to you. Without a response plan, an alert is just another notification demanding your attention.

Assumption #3: 'Our team knows what to do'

Every team looks prepared until game day.

Late one Friday afternoon, a critical system goes offline and suddenly nobody can agree on who's in charge, what to fix first or how long it's going to take.

When there's no documented plan and no practice run, even a good team is starting from zero.

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SHINY NEW GADGET OF THE MONTH

A Monitor That Works Smarter: **BenQ RD280UG**

Some upgrades don't transform the way you work. They simply make every day a little easier. The BenQ RD280UG's taller 3:2 display fits more on screen, so you spend less time scrolling and switching windows. Built-in eye care features, USB-C connectivity and an anti-glare display make long workdays more comfortable. It's a thoughtful upgrade that helps you stay focused without adding complexity to your workspace.



Welcome, Damien!

We're excited to welcome Damien McCave to the CST team as our new IT Support Specialist!

Damien is here to help keep your technology running smoothly and make sure you get the friendly, responsive support you've come to expect from CST.

Welcome aboard, Damien!
We're glad to have you!



FREE REPORT

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

Download this eBook to discover:

- How to ensure your data can be recovered if lost, corrupted or deleted.
- 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 number one cause of data loss that businesses don't even think about until their data is erased.



Claim your **FREE** copy today at www.cstsupport.com/12facts

CARTOON OF THE MONTH



"First day jitters never really go away."

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You don't carry a spare tire because you expect a blowout tomorrow. You carry it so that if one happens, you're not standing on the shoulder trying to figure out what to do next.

A recovery plan works the same way. When something goes wrong, you don't want your team figuring things out on the fly. You want them to follow a plan.

Chaos rarely comes from the disruption itself. More often, it comes from not knowing what to do next. The more familiar the process, the faster your business gets back on its feet.

Assumption #4: 'It won't happen to us'

Nobody thinks they'll be the one until they are. When you're focused on growth, customers and keeping things moving, disruption feels like something that happens to other companies. Not yours.

But most disruptions are ordinary, like an employee clicking a bad link in a phishing email, a power outage hitting or a piece of hardware finally giving out. They don't arrive with much warning, and they don't care how busy your business is.

The question isn't whether something unexpected will happen. It's whether you'll be ready when it does.

The businesses that recover fastest didn't get lucky. They got ready. Preparation doesn't stop every incident, but it does determine how quickly you recover from one.

You can't block a punch you didn't prepare for

In our experience, it's never the big dramatic event that catches businesses off guard. It's the ordinary one that happens on a Wednesday when nobody's expecting it.

You don't need the biggest IT budget to recover fast. You need a plan for the day something breaks.

A good plan tells the team what needs to come back first, who's responsible for what and how they'll keep the business moving while systems are restored.

The good news is that most of these risks can be addressed before they become business problems.

Testing your backups, reviewing your recovery plan and making sure people know their role can make the difference between a short interruption and a long recovery.

Preparation won't prevent every outage, but it will determine how quickly you recover and how much disruption your business has to absorb.

Tech Talk With Lisa Cont.

is about honoring the people whose work has helped build, strengthen, and move our country forward.

President Theodore Roosevelt once said during a Labor Day celebration:

“Far and away the best prize that life offers is the chance to work hard at work worth doing.”

More than a century later, I think there is a lot packed into those few words.

Work Hard. And do Work Worth Doing.

That got me thinking about what it means to be a hard-working American today.

I grew up in a generation where hard work had a pretty clear definition. You showed up. You showed up on time. You stayed until the job was done. You didn't expect recognition for doing what was expected of you, and if something needed to be done, you rolled up your sleeves and did it.

For many of us, the number of hours we worked became almost a badge of honor.

But the workplace has changed. Technology has changed how we communicate, where we work, how quickly we can accomplish something, and even what a "workday" looks like. Younger generations entering the workforce often think differently

about productivity, flexibility, work-life balance (which, in my opinion, doesn't exist), and what they want from a career.

I'll admit, sometimes that can be difficult for those of us who grew up with a different definition of work ethic.

But I also think there is an opportunity to learn from each other.

Hard work should not necessarily be measured by how many hours someone sits behind a desk. It should be measured by what they bring to the table.

Did you keep your commitment? Did you solve the problem? Did you take responsibility when something went wrong? Did you help your coworker when they needed you? Did you look for a better way to accomplish something? Did you give the customer the level of service they deserved? Did you leave something better than you found it?

Those are qualities that don't belong to Baby Boomers, Gen X, Millennials, or Gen Z. They belong to good employees, good leaders, and good people.

And perhaps technology is forcing us to rethink some of our old definitions.

Artificial intelligence can now complete tasks in minutes that once took hours. Automation can eliminate repetitive work.

Teams can collaborate from different states. An employee who finds a way to accomplish in two hours what previously took six isn't necessarily working less. They may simply be working smarter.

And maybe that brings us back to Roosevelt's words.

“The chance to work hard at work worth doing.”

As AI and automation take over more repetitive tasks, perhaps one of the opportunities in front of us is to spend more of our time on the work that really does matter. Solving problems. Creating something new. Serving a customer. Helping a coworker. Building a business. Teaching someone. Caring for someone. Leading a team. Making our communities better.

Technology can help us do those things more efficiently, but there is something technology cannot replace. Work ethic.

AI can't make someone care. Technology can't create personal accountability. Software can't make someone take pride in their work. Those things still come from people.

At CST, I see that every day. Technology is what we do, but people are what make it work. Behind every support ticket, cybersecurity alert, project, phone call, client meeting, and new idea is a person making a decision to care about the outcome.

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Tech Talk With Lisa Cont.

And as employers and leaders, we have a responsibility too.

If we expect people to give us their best, we need to give them the tools, training, support, respect, and opportunities they need to succeed. As the workplace continues to change, good leadership requires us to evolve along with it.

More than 130 years after Labor Day became a federal holiday, the way Americans work looks very different. The tools have changed. The workplace has changed. Our expectations have changed.

Maybe even our definition of "hard work" needs to change.

But showing up with integrity, taking responsibility, contributing to the team, caring about the quality of your work, and giving your best effort should never go out of style.

This Labor Day, I want to say thank you to the hardworking people on our CST team, our clients, our partners, and hardworking Americans everywhere.

Whatever your job may be, and wherever you may do it, take a moment this Labor Day to be proud of the contribution you make.

And perhaps Roosevelt said it best.

May we all have the opportunity to ***"work hard at work worth doing."***

Happy Labor Day, and thank you for what you do.

Lisa



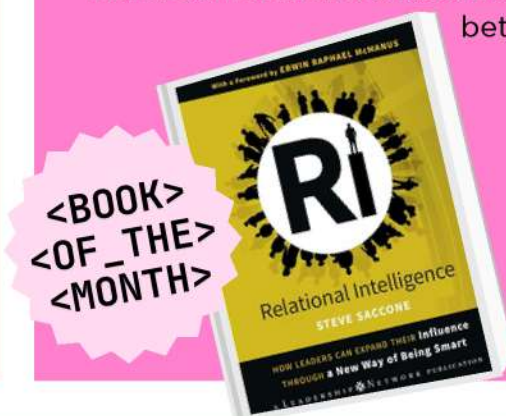
WHAT I'M READING

"Relational Intelligence: How Leaders Can Explain Their Influence Through a New Way of Being Smart" by Steve Saccone

This month's "What I'm Reading" comes from a recommendation from my son, Evin. What caught my attention was the book's message that being a smart leader isn't just about what you know. It's also about how well you understand, connect with, and relate to the people around you.

That really resonates with me. After more than 25 years in business, I have learned that leadership is rarely just about having the right answer. You can have the best strategy, the best technology, or the best idea in the room, but if you don't know how to communicate, listen, build trust, and understand the people around you, getting everyone moving in the same direction can be difficult.

I'm still working my way through this one, but it has already given me something to think about: Maybe becoming a better leader isn't always about learning more. Sometimes it's about learning to understand people better.





This Isn't a Sales Strategy. It's Who We Are.

I don't have a traditional sales team.

I'm the CEO of a technology company, and yet you'll often find me talking directly with business owners, municipal leaders, and organizations about cybersecurity and technology risk.

Why? Because I genuinely care whether their businesses are protected.

The same is true of my team. The people at CST aren't sitting around thinking about the next "sale." They're real people who talk to clients every day, solve their problems, answer their calls, protect their data, and sometimes lose sleep when we know an organization has a risk that hasn't been addressed.

Sometimes I think we value the protection of a business more than the business owner does.

I don't mean that critically. Cyber risk is easy to underestimate because much of it is invisible. You don't see the attempted logins that were blocked overnight. You don't see the malicious email that almost reached an employee. You don't think much about the backup until a server fails. And you probably don't spend your day wondering what would happen if someone clicked the wrong link tomorrow morning.

We do. That's our job.

Unfortunately, cybersecurity is one of those things people often appreciate most **after something bad happens**. A ransomware attack. A compromised email account. Stolen funds. Lost data. A business that suddenly can't operate.

That's why we can sometimes sound passionate when we're talking about protection.

Our passion isn't a sales tactic. It's not manufactured urgency. It's not a gimmick. And it's certainly not about scaring someone into buying something.

It's what happens when you understand the risk, know how much damage it can cause, and genuinely want to prevent someone from experiencing it.

Will every business we talk to become a CST client? Of course not.

But I still want them protected.

If something I say causes a business owner to turn on MFA, improve their backups, train their employees, question an outdated security practice, or have a serious conversation with their current IT provider, that's a win too.

That's what **Passionate Not Pushy** means to me.

I will educate you. I will tell you what I see. I will explain the risk. I will recommend what I believe you should do. But the decision will always be yours.

For us, being passionate simply means caring enough to speak up, share what we know, and help businesses protect what they have worked so hard to build.

Lisa

DON'T FUMBLE YOUR I.T. BUDGET

Fall football is back and it's time to make sure your business is ready for the season ahead.

For small Businesses and Local Government I.T. and cybersecurity shouldn't be an afterthought in the budget. They're part of protecting the services your customers depend on every day.

Before you finalize next year's budget, ask:

- Is your infrastructure ready for the next drive?
- Is your cybersecurity defense strong enough?
- Are you budgeting for technology upgrades—not just emergencies?
- Do you have a plan for compliance, backups, and employee training?

The biggest budget mistake? Waiting until something breaks to fund it.

PLAY OFFENSE. NOT CATCH-UP.

Build cybersecurity and technology into your budget before the clock runs out.

Need help identifying what you should be budgeting for?

Talk to US!! We can help you plan, protect, and make smarter technology investments.

Don't fumble your I.T. budget. Make your next play a smart one.



FALL INTO BETTER CALLS

September is the perfect time for a fresh start, including your phone system.

Is your business still dealing with outdated phones, missed calls, limited flexibility, or a system that makes simple things harder than they should be?

It may be time for a change.

Modern VoIP can give your team the flexibility to answer calls from the office, home, or on the go—while providing professional features that help your business communicate better and work smarter.

Think of it as a little fall cleanup for your communications. 🍁

DON'T LET YOUR PHONE SYSTEM FALL BEHIND.

Call Michelle to schedule your FREE VoIP demo and discover what a smarter phone system could do for your business.

📞 Call Michelle today!
518-483-4100



BACK TO SCHOOL... BUT MAKE IT CYBERSECURE!

New season. New skills. Stronger team.

The kids aren't the only ones heading back to school this fall.

Your employees should be learning, too.

Technology changes. Cyber threats evolve. And the skills your team needs today may look very different tomorrow. That's why CST Academy helps your employees stay sharp with practical training designed to improve cybersecurity awareness, productivity, technology skills, and confidence.

Because when your team knows more, your business is better protected.

NEVER STOP LEARNING.

Make this fall the season your team gets smarter, safer, and more confident with technology.
Schedule a CST Academy training today.

