Jim's Profit Accelerator 173
The Hidden Trap in Software Upgrades

Changing software is a bit like hunting for birds in the woods. You know what you want, and you sort of know how to get there, but it takes longer and is much more complex than you expected—even when you've prepared carefully. Furthermore, you can go a long time without seeing any birds.

Many leaders have their version of this story, which happened to me: When I worked at a manufacturing company, I led a team that decided it was time to upgrade our MRP software (accounting, purchasing, production scheduling, and so forth). We paid an expert to match our needs with available software and an installation/training team. We questioned, tested, and checked with other clients using the software/installers. When we launched, these were the outcomes:

1. We underestimated how hard it was to change processes—the actual work that our employees do to prepare and enter the data that the system requires.
2. We thought that training equaled mastery for our folks. It didn't.
3. We expected that we'd be up and running in about 90 days. We weren't.
4. We thought our three months of parallel operations (old way, new way) were sufficient. It wasn't.

SPEED BUMP: Raise your hand if your new software took way longer than you thought.

Next error: We assumed that the problem was with the software or the trainers. It wasn't. We underestimated, dramatically, how hard it is for our key folks (those interacting with the software) to do these at the same time:

1. Learn the new way.
2. Master the new way.
3. Do their job the old way.

New Way • Learn

New Way • Master

Run the business • Maintain
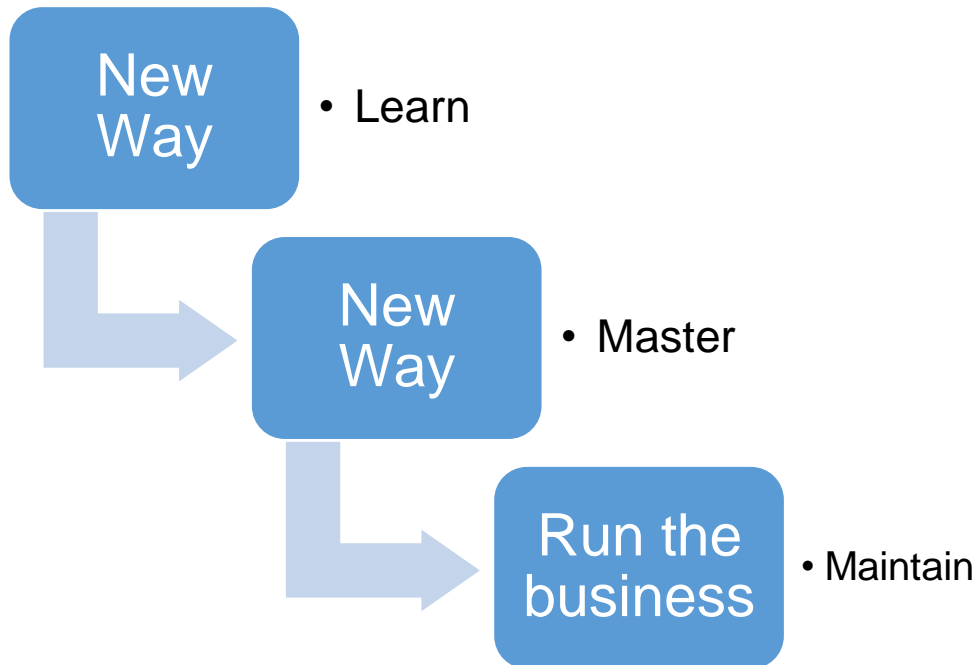
SPEED BUMP: New processes are the Achilles heel of new software.

Each of the three can be done. Doing them at the same time verges on impossible. The results:

1. Angry, frustrated employees
2. Angry, frustrated customers
3. Diversion of leadership from serving the customer to getting the software running

The hidden trap: The new software likely will make things better/faster/easier, but not yet. In the short run, what's more likely is that:

1. Costs rise
2. Service drops
3. Customer complaints rise

If there were ever a time to have rock-solid measures of shipments (or whatever you deliver to your customers), now is the time. Those measures are the only thing pulling your organization back to doing the things that brought you customers in the first place. The software is such a squeaky wheel that it drowns out all other noise, with frightening consequences for customer satisfaction, profit, and employee pride.

ACCELERANT: How will you maintain your standard while upgrading software?

For more information on how you can accelerate revenues and profits in your business, please call or email me.

A note on **SPEED BUMPS:** Use them to click quickly with an idea that can immediately be implemented in your life as a business leader. Think: "How can I use this today? or "Who can use this?"

For more information, visit www.grewco.com.

Jim Grew, the Business Defogger and Accelerator, helps leaders discover hidden opportunities within their businesses and exploit them for dramatic results. Jim has led 9 businesses, worked in 31 companies at C-level, and is an expert in strategy and executive leadership. He presents regularly to industry groups, mentors business leaders, and shares insights in his Executive Letter (above). Jim holds BA and MBA degrees from Stanford University. In his new book, *The Other Side of Succession*, he shares how to plan for the future by growing your business now.