Founder's Forum
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Technological Prisoners

Recently, I had the pleasure of spending some time with our software provider to brainstorm how their product could be enhanced. Our office has served as a beta site for new versions of their program, much to the chagrin of some of my staff. When you serve as a beta site, you act as a guinea pig for a new product. You test how it works and find its flaws. I have volunteered our office for this practice in the past because I find when the project is completed, we end up having a better understanding of how the software can benefit our practice and also feel like we have had an influence in the final product. In my experience, we probably use 30-40% of the capabilities of our software. My guess is that this is a representative figure in any business environment. Anytime you increase that percentage, your office efficiency should improve.

I knew the software vendor was coming in ahead of time, which gave me a chance to ponder this issue: What do I really want from our office technology? Although there are many answers, the most important thing I want is information. I care about document creation, financial reporting and other issues. At the end of the day, however, accurate and easily accessible information is what I want the most. My wife tells me to stop using truisms, but I can not resist: Information is power; I believe that more than ever. When a client calls my office and I can answer the question by instantly accessing my electronic files, I look good. When our office staff is debating a course of action regarding the handling of a group of files, having information about those cases is the best guide to making a good decision. That information usually comes from our software.

Much of the discussion with our vendor focused on making the information from our system available on my Blackberry. When I am on the road, I rely more and more on my Blackberry instead of my laptop. I have come to expect that I can almost get as much information from my phone as from my computer. I was asked whether it mattered if the data was read-only or accessible to be altered. Today, I just want to see the data. Ask me the same question in two months and my answer may change. That is the nature of technology.

An example of information that would be conveniently accessible on the road would be the ability to access the amount of expenses we have advanced on a particular file. This information, while generally not contained in a hard copy file that I may have with me at an out-of-town mediation, would be helpful to access when evaluating a settlement offer. This type of information is easily available on my desktop. I would like it to be available on my Blackberry. I am sure that some provider will (or maybe already has) make such data available on a hand-held device some time soon. That type of access makes my job easier, which is what technology is supposed to be all about.

Anyone involved in subrogation management is a prisoner, in some way, to technology. We need the information. We crave the secrets it holds. How are we doing? How is an individual performing? Are we meeting the benchmarks? These issues are never easy to answer. Our best guide lies within the data held by our technology. We rely heavily on the companies that help us get to the data. For most of us, we don't care how it works, just that it does. In addition, people with my limited intelligence need to be able to figure out how to use it. If it works and I can use it, I can't live without it.

Jeff Baill is a nationally recognized attorney and consultant in the field of subrogation. He has focused his practice in the area of subrogation for over 25 years. Jeff is the managing partner at the Law Firm of Yost & Baill in Minneapolis. In addition to being the Founder and Past President of NASP, he is the Past President of a prominent United Way Agency and currently serves on the board of the USTA Northern Section.