

The best advice you never asked for

(Reprinted with Permission from the Jan 2007 HIS Insider)

“Below, HIT consultant Vince Ciotti shares 10 uncommon tips that may just save your job.

1. Don't get sucked into huge consulting contracts. As a consultant who's on the road more often than not, Ciotti routinely handles big projects. But he's "amazed and ashamed that consultants sign six, seven, even eight-figure 'engagements,' to help hospitals select the biggest, most complex systems possible, then spend years training their juniors on the implementation."

Print this out and put it on your bulletin board: "Consultants should be brought in for a few thousand dollars (not millions), to give advice where they have experience (not learning on the hospital's nickel), and then leave within a few months (not years)."

2. Automate nursing functions first, from assessments to care plans, notes to vitals. Think about it - nurses make up the single largest user group in a hospital. They also give direct care to patients. Yet in most hospitals, nursing has zero automation. What's your shop done for nurses lately?

3. Refuse to buy "vision-ware." Avoid not just unfinished products, but selection processes focusing on impossibly long RFP feature checklists, power point demos rather than site visits and phone references, visits to vendor Taj Mahal corporate offices, etc.

4. Improve your system interfaces. Unless you're a single-vendor shop like Meditech, you've probably got dozens of balky interfaces that plague users and IT staffers alike. In a "best of breed" shop, expect to encounter the most problems fixing ADT in, charges out, orders in, results out and the like, Ciotti says.

5. Reject RHIO-mania. If you agree that most hospitals cannot get their internal systems interfaced well, and registrars assign duplicate medical record numbers every day due to the plethora of systems, then maybe it's not a good idea "to put these incomplete and mis-numbered records up on the Internet," Ciotti says.

6. Transform the Help Desk. Ciotti asks, "Are the lowest-paid and least-trained individuals in IT the primary people talking to end users? Are your expert analysts stuck in their cubes, while MDs and RNs scream at clerks who want them to fill out trouble tickets?"

If this describes your Help Desk, spend the time, energy and money to improve service. When employees, from senior administrators to housekeeping, reference IT, they're usually talking about the Help Desk; make sure their experiences are

positive.

7. Ask administration to enforce super-users in each department. Ciotti clients who train super-users in Microsoft and their applications, and get management buy-in, see a dramatic drop in IT/Help Desk distress calls.

8. Be wary of “partnering” with vendors. “The word ‘vendor’ comes from the Latin for ‘to sell,’ and that’s what vendors do. You can partner with a hospital or practice also providing health care, but you buy from vendors who use the word ‘partner’ to get by your defenses,” he notes.

9. Audit monthly vendor invoices. When is the last time you ever challenged one of their line items? It’s like a credit card: only a handful of people read the detailed bill and challenge incorrect items, Ciotti says. Try it just one month and see if reversing the overcharges doesn’t make it worth the auditing time.

10. Start doing user surveys. Common among the best IT shops but rare overall, Ciotti says “repeated surveys can guide IT in doing what users want, not what IT reads in CIO magazine.”

Don’t get discouraged if initial survey results indicate widespread dissatisfaction with your department, he adds. They’ll improve if you deliver change.