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It's always the smiles that get you. Old cars have a way of generating smiles that is magical. On this day, the smiles were accompanied by stumbles, wide eyes, thumbs up and desperate attempts to catch us in traffic for a closer look. We were cruising in my lifelong friend Mark Kuyrkendall's 1966 Lincoln close-coupled convertible sedan. That's a car buff's way of saying it's a four door Lincoln convertible with rear suicide doors, most prominently burned into our collective consciousness as the car that President Kennedy was riding in on that fateful day in Dallas.

As we silently coursed the historic streets filled with Victorian homes, bathed in sunshine and warmed by the reactions of those we encountered, I pondered the position I enjoyed. With Mark at the controls, and my wife in the passenger seat, I enjoyed the expanses of the rear seat alone. I instinctively chose the right rear seat, and practiced the "screw in the light bulb" wave taught to every beauty queen, politician and minor celebrity who had ever shared in my experience of the parting seas of smiles and waves, rolling and spreading like a wake on each side of this most extraordinary automobile. This was the very same position that JFK was in. The target seat. The bullseye.

I don't suppose we'll ever really know what JFK did to attract those bullets, or who or how many delivered them. All we can do is to try to ensure that we don't make any of the moves sure to attract the fire of the potential assassins that surround us in our efforts to bring data mart and data warehouse systems to our clients and organizations. There are, after all, some sure ways to draw fire.

1. Tell the truth. As any veteran of data warehousing can tell you, there's no better way to discover the full impact of the phrase "shoot the messenger" than to deliver an unpleasant truth to an audience that doesn't profit by the telling. In your efforts to deliver clean, unvarnished information to your enterprise, you will almost inevitably discover that the business has been using inaccurate information for years. Many times individuals, management layers, or entire organizations may be compensated based on erroneous information. Woe to the unwary data warehouse team that simply delivers the actual truth to an unprepared organization.

Your first challenge will be that the organization will attack your credibility, and label the entire data warehouse system as inaccurate and filled with unreliable data. You will find it very challenging to recover from the resulting loss of utilization. Your second challenge will be to stay alive as the people whose economic futures are put in peril come seeking your blood.

To avoid this ugly fate, you must document and communicate any deltas between your new, accurate data and the old, inaccurate data prior to pilot or rollout. You must also inform your

entire management hierarchy of all such disparities, so they can provide for their own political air cover, and hopefully, yours as well.

2. Change the established order. The immutable rule still holds true: knowledge is power. By putting information in the hands of users, you forever change the distribution of power in the enterprise. A second immutable rule also holds true: those in power will seek to retain power. By enabling people with information, you can be viewed as threatening the power and control of those who currently hold it.

Successful, sustainable data warehouse and data mart systems forever change the balance of power by allowing anyone to access information, perform analysis and drive decisions. By removing the need for 20 days of manual data extraction and compilation work teams can find they no longer have a reason to exist. Pushing decisions down in the organization can eliminate entire organizations. In our society, there always must be someone to blame for anything unpleasant, you will most likely be the target.

To ensure your long-term health, enlist your management consultant team or internal resources that are tasked with change management. Start out by contacting the teams and people who are responsible for change management issues centered on business process re-engineering.

3. Focusing on “wow.” The first three or four times Mark put down the convertible top on his Lincoln, children and adults from the entire neighborhood came running to watch. The synchronized dance of the 11 relays progressively activating four huge hydraulic rams, a top lock motor, two window motors, the deck motor, pump assembly and the twin screw deck lock motor was irresistible to watch as the trunk lid rose open like a giant clam to swallow the top. However, now it is old hat, and few locals turn out to watch the show.

The same fate will befall your system if you don't concentrate on delivering specific business value. The “wow” of “now we finally have access to the data” wears off quickly. You must deliver long term value to the organization by solving specific business problems. Customer relationship management, churn management, marketing program ROI analysis, uptime optimization, etc. are what is important, not how many terabytes of data you have, how many queries per hour you run, or other technical niceties.

After JFK was shot, American presidents were consigned to armored, bulletproof sedans. No American president since 1963 has known the wonder and charm of a ride in an open car on a warm day. Because the world changed, there was no longer a need for a close-coupled convertible sedan. The engineering triumph of the technical complexity was not enough to save it, and it won't be enough to save you or your system either.

Build business solutions.

And enjoy the ride.

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