Fear of tech is a competitive disadvantage

Starting your own digital revolution is easier than you think.

Lauren du Plooy, director at Rae & Associates

Businesses that embrace technology and empower their employees with Fourth Industrial Revolution skills enjoy better growth and become more resilient, says an expert consultant for business owners and entrepreneurs. The fear of change could mean a business gets left behind.

Lauren du Plooy, director at Rae & Associates and an Intuit QuickBooks trainer, says that digitally smart businesses have better control of everyday processes, meaning owners are more empowered to make future budget decisions or plans at t touch of a button.

The most apparent and immediate benefit of a digitally transformed business is automation, which in turn frees up the time and resources of employees, she says. Tracking tasks, projects and invoices in real-time gives managers a birds-eye view of the business, freeing up resources proactively for a more efficient, and profitable business.

However, du Plooy says, many businesses are putting off digital transformation because of a fear of time and resource requirements, the need to train staff and the unknown. She says that overcoming these perceived obstacles is not as diffic as many owners think, so there's no need to risk being left behind.

She adds that the biggest misconception is that embracing technology will be a long, hard process.

> "Business owners fear the implementation will take up valuable time and manpower. In truth, many just don't realise how easy it is to start on the digital journey."

Where do you start?

She says that business owners need to make sure they are implementing the correct programs so that they enjoy the

positive change they set out to achieve.

"There are many firms out there that specialise in business coaching around implementing the technology. My advice wou[ld] be to reach out and get advice from professionals. Look what's happening in your industry and how it has helped other businesses – you will be surprised at how willing people are to share their experiences," says du Plooy.

Buy-in and upskilling of employees

Du Plooy says that one of the most important aspects of embracing technology is getting the full support and buy-in of employees. Not only will this go a long way towards new programs having the desired impact on the business, but it will als[o] equip employees with relevant skills for the fourth industrial revolution. Besides being the right thing to do, it is good for business.

She advises spending time understanding the challenges employees face in the business. This way, businesses are able t[o] implement processes and programs that will support, benefit and address real challenges. "This makes staff involved from [the] beginning, which goes a long way to giving them a sense of ownership of the change.

"It is imperative to have the buy-in from staff to ensure they understand the benefits of the change. Staff need to be comfortable with the change and then equipped with the requisite skills," says Du Plooy.

Employee-led transformation

Du Plooy says business owners should consider electing an employee who would drive the entire process from the inside.

"Make sure you have a champion of change in the organisation. This is a staff member that can help you with rolling out t[he] training and implementation. This champion will, in essence, drive your digital revolution," says Du Plooy.

Building skills and a team

"Most software programmes have certification training for staff to take, so set up a time frame and comfortable environmen[t] for employees to complete the certification training," she says.

"Try keep training and certification away from peak deadline times and consider rewarding staff and celebrating as a company when everyone is certified. It works as a great team-building initiative while upskilling the workforce."

Staying on the pulse

Du Plooy says there are so many developments happening so fast in technology and businesses owners need to be awar[e] of innovations that could change or improve their businesses. These innovations include process automation, cloud-based cybersecurity platforms, intelligent applications, artificial intelligence and a host of applications that are based on the value [of] data.

"Whether it is automating payroll, invoices or processes, or providing a birds-eye view of the business at the touch of a button, technology is allowing business owners and managers to focus on growing the business," she says.

Delaying the uptake of technology is a competitive disadvantage. The rewards, says Du Plooy, outweigh the fear of getting started in the first place.