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## Interview

BY DEBBY YOUNG

# Hall DAVIDSON



Hall Davidson is the Emmy-winning director of educational services at KOCE-TV, a public television station that serves the Los Angeles area. He is also executive director of Telecommunications of Orange County, a media and educational consortium. He writes on the impact of technology in education and has served on technology education task forces and advisory boards.

**CIO: You refer to the modern office workstation as a "death trap for creativity." Why?**

**Davidson:** Neurologists and anthropologists are now proving what educators like Montessori knew all along: People learn with their hands. Reaching, grasping and manipulating things with two hands stimulates sections of the brain connected with creativity, intuition and problem-solving. If you spend hours at a time moving a mouse along a two-dimensional plane, you put that creative part of your brain to sleep.

**So is all the effort companies put into making an ergonomic workplace misplaced?**


No, but if CIOs think of people only in terms of connections to the network, they're going to fail. When you hire somebody, you want them to use all their brain. Yet the physical work it takes to do the tasks that we have people do on the computer stifles the kind of creativity we want to stimulate.

Neurologist Frank Wilson studied why young engineers couldn't solve problems as well as older engineers could. It wasn't a matter of intelligence. But older engineers invariably worked on their own cars, got under the hood and fixed them. Engineers

from the generation of throwaway parts never did that reaching and grasping, which stimulates the problem-solving areas of the brain.

### Should companies totally redesign the workplace then?

Not at all. Just walk around and look at the cubicles of successful problem-solvers. See how much of what goes on there involves three-dimensional hand activity. A Rolodex that has to be turned by hand. A Velcro dartboard or a Nerf ball game in the corner. It's all stuff that they're using to help them think.

The important thing is to make sure you offer an environment with enough activity to stimulate the brain. Put in a pinball machine where you have to gauge the tension on the ball release rod. Or set up a communal needlepoint project. Whatever. The activities don't have to be intellectually satisfying, just something to break up the single-handed, two-dimensional activities that take place in most cubicles. Make 10-minute play breaks part of the routine to clear the mind and stimulate the brain. If you do that, I would bet that within a year you would have a department that's contributing at a much higher level than before. 

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Debby Young is a freelance writer in Framingham, Mass. Share your brain stimuli with us at [interview@cio.com](mailto:interview@cio.com).

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