

Sometime ago we began entry into the information age. Instant worldwide communication, 24/7 news, satellite imagery and that information super highway called the internet was becoming a part of our lives. All of this, we were told, was going to make us a smarter, better informed, healthier, and a more prepared and prosperous nation. Well some of that may be true and I'm sure that in certain cases more information is better. However, over the past few years I have become more aware of the fact that in some cases too much information, although accurate, can become a hindrance to us, overloading our minds, causing undue stress, complicating and delaying the decision process and undermining our inherent abilities to make the right decision in a timely manner. Simply put, sometimes too much information can be a bad thing. The amount of information individuals can handle varies from

person to person but even the best of us can be overwhelmed. Even highly trained pilots need to be protected from receiving non-essential information at certain times. The computer on some commercial aircraft as example, will, during takeoff (a time when we don't want to distract the pilot) prevent a warning light from flashing if it indicates a problem that will not interfere with the pilot's task of getting the plane into the air safely. The pilot is in essence being protected from unimportant information. One of the goals for each of us is to figure out what information we need to know to do the job correctly and separate it from the clutter.

Over my years of racing I met many types of people from a wide variety of backgrounds. Some were graduate engineers and others were self taught "shade tree" mechanics. I used to think that because making a car run fast requires engineering

and physics that the more formally educated would excel and the guy without the degree would be at a major disadvantage.

But my observations were contrary to this. The engineer's car in many cases wasn't any faster than that of the self taught mechanic and in some cases the engineer's car was slower. This made no sense to me for many years. Then I finally started to understand this phenomenon.

First in defense of engineers let me say that I am greatly generalizing. Many of them run and operate their cars quite well and others provide much needed insight, analysis and advice to many major teams. I'm using engineers as an example only. Suppose you monitor 40 different functions on your race car. All of these items may be interesting but there may be only a few of them that you "really have to understand" to make the decision as to what to do for the next round. If

you don't know which items matter and/or if you pay too much attention to non-essential details, and not enough time on essential details you may make a poor choice.

There is a lot to be said for experience. Some of the best crew chiefs I know do not have formal training in their field of expertise. They are however intelligent and have watched thousands of race cars run down the track. They have over the course of many years trained their senses to observe almost undetectable bits of information about how a rear tire looked, how the car left or how it sounded. They have developed almost a sixth sense of what the car did and what they need to do next. They then combine this observation with the data from the Racepak and make their decisions. I do believe that these top crew chiefs would not be able to run their cars as

well if they were removed from the starting line and only left with the computer data.

There is a melting together of technology and a gut feeling that drives them to their decisions. And they absolutely must be good at differentiating between data that matters and data that doesn't.

A recent book I read was written by Malcolm Gladwell and it is titled "Blink". It was on the New York Times best sellers list for some time and if interested you'll find it at any good book store. Gladwell does a wonderful and entertaining job of describing the human ability to make correct decisions based on intuitive reasoning. It did, at least for me, shed some light on the problem of over-analysis in our jobs and lives. In fact, Gladwell suggests that we just may make better snap decisions

then we think we do and the old adage that “it just doesn’t feel right” may be your best indicator of all.

I am however a huge endorser of higher education and believe that each person should pursue their education as far as possible, getting a degree in their chosen field. But we need to be careful in our jobs and our lives when deciding which information is key and should be acted upon and separate it from all the other non-essential data we are bombarded with.

At our driving school we use this principal in our classes. By teaching new drivers the fundamentals clearly, concisely, and without clutter, we can produce better drivers in a shorter period of time. If you need some help organizing your thoughts, procedures and practices... give us a call. We’d be glad to help.