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What to do when rules don't make sense: Mount from the right!

In the horse world, mounting your steed from the left side is taken as 'the way to do it'. This conventional wisdom has led to horses becoming accustomed to being mounted from the left, reinforcing an important conditioning behaviour concerning how horses learn. Horses see independently with each eye, meaning that what the left eye (brain) sees, isn't necessarily what the right eye (brain) sees. In other words what is 'known' on the left doesn't necessarily translate to knowledge on the right: the two sides don't 'talk to each other'. "Wow, that sounds just like my kids" I can hear you mutter and on further reflection, you might well add your boss to that listing!

The obvious question to be asking is why is it that we accept mounting from the left as the 'way to do it'? The answer is that the reasons for this norm can be found rooted in the days of the cavalry. In the cavalry context one's sword was sheathed on the left-hand side, making the drawing of the weapon easier, which was bad luck if you happened to be left-handed! I guess a short life expectancy would have been the obvious conclusion to that particular dilemma. All this meant that when mounting your horse, the left foot would be used to step into the stirrup and the right leg thus freed to swing over the horse in the mounting process. I know at this point you'll need to pause to figure this logic out and so I'll give you a moment to do precisely that...

OK...got that sorted then? (Remember to offer an explanation to those who might have witnessed you performing this maneuver on your office chair should you be the practical type who needed to figure this out in a more practical manner) So, when it came to the horsemanship of Native Americans, not many of whom wore swords, the mounting procedure was less inhibited and the left rule simply didn't apply.

The point I am making is that all too often we see business rules being enforced where the contextual logic for such rules has long since disappeared. When questioned as to why we do it this way the array of answers given can usually be summed up by the stock response of, "well that's the way we have always done it around here and so that's just the way it is". This of course is then followed by, "...so just get on and do it" with about as much maneuver room as a horse in a pigpen.

Challenging conventional wisdom is no easy matter, yet the failure to challenge our conventional wisdom will, in a world of exponential change, prove fatal. The one obstacle to overcome is that the challenge usually comes from a generation who are, in the eyes of the Boomers, yet to earn their spurs in the corporate paddock. This is unfortunate as by indiscriminately defending the wisdom that got us here, we miss the opportunity to harness the wisdom required to get us to where we need to be in the new world of work.

So next time you find yourself defending some or other well worn rule, stop and ask yourself: when last did you meet somebody who rode in the cavalry?