



# Control-Alt-Delete: When It's Time to Push the Reset Key

By Paul Lemberg

What do you do when you're at a dead end and nothing seems to work?

**S**ometimes we find that our time-tested ways of doing business get fewer and fewer results. It's hard to say how this happens, except that in a complex environment — just like a computer operating system — the combined effects of other players' actions can cause your own efforts to get garbled and twisted. A year ago, your latest marketing launch might have made a big splash, but now, maybe because of new competitors with bigger marketing budgets than yours, you've made barely a ripple and all your efforts seem wasted.

So you go back to your playbook, your well-worn collection of strategies that always helped in the past, but nothing seems to work. And worse, you don't know why.

Relax, and take a deep breath, because nothing you know how to do is going to work, and following your standard playbook is like pouring money down the drain.

It's time to hit the three-fingered reset key: Control-Alt-Delete. That's what you need when your old rules, even though they still apply, aren't getting what you want. You need to clear your mind, wipe the slate clean, write on a new sheet of paper.

Hitting the reset key won't cause your competitors to go away. But it will give you the opportunity to shrug off old patterns of thought.

Pressing the reset button can be a way to achieve a new level of thinking. Instead of asking a question based on what has worked in the past, you start asking about what in the realm of possibility might work now.

Why do most cars use the same inefficient engines and fossil fuels? Why are we stuck with sub-standard television options? Why do

“Can you break the rules of your own past behavior?”

most cell phone data systems work as poorly as they do, given that some countries have achieved speeds 20 times faster? It's because all the players — producers, consumers, regulators, investors — have agreed to play by a set of rules requiring a major investment, and no one is willing to

take the risk of breaking them.

Does the same hold true for your organization? Are you bound by a real set of constraints that limit your ability to address new opportunities? In all probability, the answer is no. The rules most likely aren't hard and fast. Nobody has bothered to prove these ideas to be sure they make sense. They're simply accumulations of past history, the way things have always been done.

Can you break the rules of your own past behavior or perhaps, even more boldly, the rules set down by decades of organizational and cultural norms? Hit the reset key and see what happens.

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## A Few Ways to Stimulate Your Mind

How do you gain control of your reset key? Try getting away from your usual routine with these suggestions:

**Put your ideas into a grid.** Draw an n-row, m-column matrix, and write your thoughts along the axes. You can write the same set of thoughts along both axes, or you can divide thoughts into categories like nouns and verbs, and arrange them accordingly. Now let your mind roam and figure out what should go in the intersections.


**Read something in a new subject.** Read history, biographies, philosophy, pop science, real science, mathematics, plays, poetry, finance. Read whatever you usually don't.

**Attend a seminar.** The subject matter is unimportant. You'll usually come up with great ideas even though they may be unrelated to the speaker's words.

**Exercise.** Solitary aerobic exercise works best. Ride a bike, run, stair climb, walk fast. Be ready to write down all the ideas that come to you while your mind is wandering free.

**Meditate.** There are two types of meditation that work well to refresh the mind. With free-form meditation, you concentrate on a word or simple image. With more focused meditation, you direct your mind to dwell on a specific "problem" or idea.

**Draw or paint.** These activities work like aerobic exercise, opening up the creative part of the brain.

**Call a friend – preferably someone you don't speak with often.** Talk about anything. This seems to work like the "seminar" process. All of a sudden, stuff blurts out of your mouth and exciting new ideas are born. 



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