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Description

Computer consultant Richard Byrne discusses "computer phobia" -- the fear many established workers and executives have of the workings and mastery of new computer technology.

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Transcript

Growing Problem in Business World: Computer Phobia

JANE PAULEY, anchor:

Man throughout the ages has been fascinated by new machines and how they work, but rarely is it love at first sight. These look like TV sets but then nothing familiar appears on the screen. A new angst is creeping into our psyche and it has a name, it’s called computer phobia. And special classes are springing up all over the country to deal with it. One of the men who runs just such a program called Spring Board is with us this morning, your name is Richard Byrne, and you yourself was, you was, you were once,

RICHARD BYRNE (Computer Consultant): Yes.

PAULEY: A computer phobe.

BYRNE: Yes I were.

PAULEY: How’d you lick it?

BYRNE: I was really terrified of computers, I taught at USC and it seemed like everybody knew it and I was from the arts and they were off in the sciences and so I,

PAULEY: Palm sweat tension?

BYRNE: Oh yeah, sure, I was scared to death and I went out and I bought a computer and bought printers and disc drives and I mean I didn’t know anything, I didn’t know what any of it was and I said to this young kid who was about eighteen, you know what do I need, he said well you need this and this and this and this and this and of course since I was terrified I said yeah sure.

PAULEY: Sharp young man.

BYRNE: Of course and I wrote out the check and got ready to leave and I said how do I learn how to use this and he said can you read? And I said yes, I can read and I went home, read the manuals, worked for six months and could not use the computer. Absolutely could not use it still.

PAULEY: There is a happy ending.

BYRNE: Yes there is a happy ending, I finally found a piece of software program that supported me in doing what I wanted to do. And it instantly started to work. Yeah.
PAULEY: Are, most, its senior executives though, really paranoid about some seventeen-year-old computer jockey taking their job?

BYRNE: Yeah they’re going crazy. They’re going crazy. It’s one of the first times where the younger you are, the better you are. Almost always seniority counts for something, and people who put in twenty-five years in the business somehow they ought to know something, but increasingly kids who are seventeen, eighteen years of age understand how the machines work, they are more empowered then their, then their seniors.

PAULEY: And not only that, but looking at one of these in front of the monitor is, well that’s a keyboard, and executives don’t type, they have secretaries who type.

BYRNE: Yeah there’s a, they have a whole mystique, they say I don’t type, not that I can’t type, and so one of the problems they face is that you got to start doing something that you never did before, that was never,

PAULEY: And if you’re not very good at it you might look foolish.

BYRNE: Oh yeah of course you’ll look foolish.

PAULEY: Don’t you call that jerk-o-phobia?

BYRNE: Yeah, I think, I think that’s the problem is jerkophobia, not computer phobia. People don’t like to look stupid, and so they don’t want to learn how to do it at the office and they don’t know how to learn how to do it at home, and they’re also afraid should I buy a machine, like won’t all these computers, we’re surrounded here with all these computers, won’t they get smaller, the answer is yeah, won’t they get cheaper, won’t they get more powerful. So a lot of executives think well, maybe I ought to wait, I don’t want to get one now because I’ll look stupid, but if I wait everybody else knows how to do it and I’ll look stupid, and so a lot of people just wish this whole thing would disappear which it’s not going to do.

PAULEY: In other words the executives who are very afraid of getting left behind,

BYRNE: Yeah.

PAULEY: Are afraid for good reason?

BYRNE: Oh absolutely, this is, some people think this is all hype, this is all PR and scam and advertising just to sell hardware. It’s not. Once you’ve used a personal computer to do your writing and do your financials and stuff you’ll never go back to a typewriter.

PAULEY: Richard Byrne thank you for being here with us.