

## Protect the Future!

by Chris, April 2009

### protect the future

In some recent posts, I've been exploring the idea that the aggregate of our decisions regarding technology and how we use it could create a scenario that is, in the long run, one we don't want. (See [Your Profile is Not Private, and other Seemingly Obvious Things](#) and [Cloud Computing and Privacy](#), specifically.) I was thinking about this a bit more yesterday, in light of the [Three Necessary Disciplines](#), presentation I gave at our annual winter retreat in February. As a reminder, the three necessary disciplines were [Be a Human Synthesizer](#), [Try to Visualize Catastrophe](#), and [Think Like a Time Traveler](#).

In case I didn't make it clear, the idea of "visualizing catastrophe" was not really meant to be about being able to prevent or avoid every failure. Rather, it was more about how **anticipating** failure will cause you to make better decisions, in general. Sometimes failure is unavoidable, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't try to secure a good future. In my post from last week about cloud computing and privacy, I looked at a talk given by Brad Templeton, who warned that we are making critical decisions in regard to our privacy and technology without really being aware of it. In the comments section we started a pretty good discussion about it, in which one reader, Andrew, wrote:

...by accident seems to be the mechanism, and so, we're already there. So now we're struggling through what to do about it. Templeton is warning that as we continue to settle in to our current way of being, our decisions will be critical to establishing the degree or extremity of the situation. How much privacy do we want and what do we want that to mean. If we just assume that all of these issues will work themselves out, we could end up in a world of hurt.

I replied:

"we could end up having made critical decisions in regard to privacy based upon benefits we see and experience now (i.e. free productivity tools, ease of use, compatibility, etc.) that may only have severely negative ramifications later. Perhaps another way of saying this is that we need to take a longer view of decisions like these, bearing in mind a potential cause and effect chain of events that may be two to three steps removed from the immediate result."

Again, two of the three disciplines emerge as a theme, but now I would summarize this is with the statement, "Protect the Future." The reason I like it is that the value of these disciplines is based on the assumption that you have a goal, or a **desired future**. If you want to achieve that goal, you have to protect it by carefully considering both what you actively do to achieve it, as well as what you may be doing passively that could jeopardize it. This is really at the root of Templeton's thought- that our passivity toward issues of privacy could seal us in to losing our privacy before we realize how much that matters to us. Though most of the topics that come up in the privacy discussions are on the broader side, the same notion of protecting the future can apply to more mundane matters, like how you run your business or a specific project.