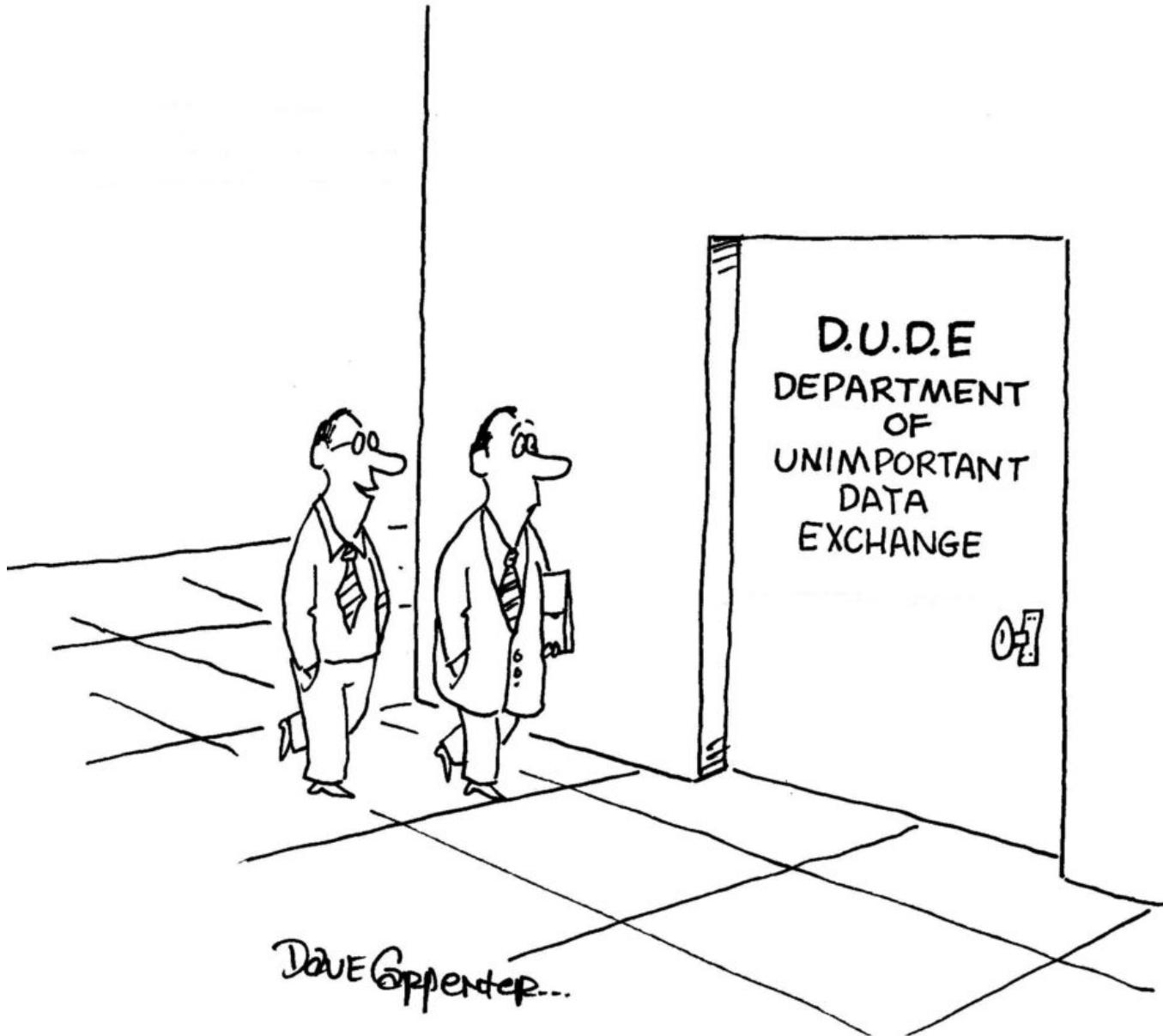


Organized abandonment



“We realize it is an unnecessary department, but the acronym was just too cool to shut it down.”

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According to American business historian Robert Sobel, the British government created a civil-service job in 1803 which called for a man to stand on the white cliffs of Dover with a spyglass and to ring a bell if he saw Napoleon coming. Napoleon died in 1821; the job continued until 1945.

Insanity surrounds us:

- Arizona - It is illegal for donkeys to sleep in bathtubs.
- Florida - If an elephant is left tied to a parking meter, the parking fee has to be paid just as it would for a vehicle.
- Kentucky - One may not dye a duckling blue and offer it for sale unless more than six are for sale at once.

Peter Drucker coined the phrase “organized abandonment” to describe the process whereby we can free up resources that are committed to maintaining things that no longer contribute to performance and no longer produce results.

According to Drucker, the change-leader puts every product, every service, every process, every customer, and every end use on trial for its life. The question to ask is, “If we did not do this already, would we, knowing what we now know, go into it?” If the answer is no, abandon it. The change-leader must also ask, “If we were to go into this now, knowing what we now know, would we go into it in the same way we are doing it now?” [Drucker, *Management Challenges for the 21st Century*, pg.74]

The term *organized* means doing this regularly and on a systematic basis.

Over time, organizations and individuals become burdened by unproductive and unnecessary actions. On a regular basis we must ruthlessly evaluate all functions and jettison those that no longer contribute.

In your personal life, organized abandonment might probe these areas:

- Do I still benefit from reading a physical daily newspaper or should I get my news digitally?
- Is there a healthier alternative to my typical breakfast?
- If I was not currently living in my neighborhood, would I choose to move here?
- Have some of my relationships grown stale; would I benefit from new, more invigorating relationships?

In your organization, probe these areas:

- As I consider every position in my organization, is each one still needed?
- Do I have the right people in key positions?
- If I had the opportunity to fill a position, would I hire the same person who is presently working in that position?
- As I analyze every line item of the budget, are all expenditures still justified?
- Are our products still viable?
- Are there any customers we should “fire”?

Another approach to this topic is to regularly adjust your life using the *Keep—Stop—Start* formula:

I want to *keep* doing, or do more of _____.

I want to *stop* doing, or do less of _____.

I want to *start* doing _____.

“We’ve always done it that way” is a feeble justification for any activity.