

Crawl. Walk. Run. Fly?

written by DaltonRuer | August 21, 2015



In 30 years as a parent I can tell you I've had many memorable moments with my 2 amazing daughters. As humans, most of our memorable moments around babies involve movement. Let's face it as cute as they are it gets old just watching them lay on their backs and smile. S

When they first get the desire to start moving and can make themselves roll over we get excited. When they can finally control the movement of their hands and their legs and can crawl to us our hearts jump for joy. When they can take those first Frankensteinish steps to our waiting, open arms we get overwhelmed. Once they've mastered balance and movement and begin running we get to play our first games of chase and tag with them.

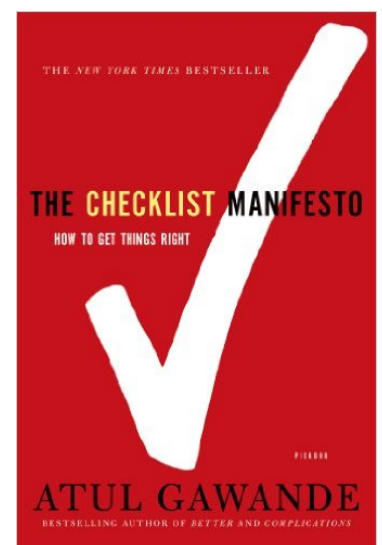
Crawling. Walking. Running. Memorable moments indeed. Those movements enable us accomplish so much. How much more could we accomplish if we ever learned how to fly. Don't look at this post like I'm crazy ... we've all jumped off the porch and flapped our arms wildly. Some of you jumped from heights higher than a porch attempting to fly and broke some bones in the process. You know who you are.

Yes there is a point to all of this. As the parent of 0's and 1's (data) for the past 30 years I've seen it crawl, walk and run and I'm beginning to see it fly. No I'm not talking about the Cloud, I'm talking about Self Service Data Visualization. I suppose I should back up a bit.

Those who work in IT, specifically those who work in data administration type roles work with data at least 8 hours a day. For most of us that is more time than we spend with our own kids. We have principles, best practices we follow to protect the data. In many ways we are more highly trained to protect the data than we are to protect our own children. So it should be of no surprise to you in business roles when you deal with IT folks that are a little over protective of their data children.

Crawl.

I just love checking off items in lists. I think we all do. There is a certain sense of accomplishment each time we check an item off. Which is why I think so much of Business Intelligence surrounds simply generating lists and static reports. Don't believe me? [The Checklist Manifesto: How to Get Things Right](#) by Atul Gawande, is a best selling book that shows the power that simple checklists have in the complexity of our lives and how they can help us avoid failures. Kind of like allowing our "data babies" to crawl. We control how much of it goes out and to whom it is allowed to "crawl." Don't get me wrong there is a huge part of the workforce in many companies who rely on those lists to do their job processes. IT management also loves lists and static reports. They can easily be used to justify more head counts. If each report takes 1 week to build and you want 52 reports ... boom 1 person year totally justified. Wait you



want thousands of reports ... “woo hoo” an entire data services team springs into being. You get to see your data. IT data workers still control the data. IT management grows its organization. It’s a win-win-win.

Walk.

Sooner or later though executives start asking for more. They want KPI’s, Dashboards and Scorecards. For some these are the Holy Grail in a matter of speaking in the field. But when you really think about all of these, they are simply the next incremental step in growing up. All the check marks, arrows and circles simply tell them the answers to the questions that they previously asked. Unlike crawling though, I think this is kind of like taking the first actual steps because at least the pretty pictures allow them to consume the data faster than they could if they had to read 317 separate static reports. IT is still central in the process, they get more staff, they get more resources and now there is direct interface with executives. It’s an ever bigger win-win-win. Our data babies are growing up indeed.

Run.

More than once in my posts I’ve shared the concept that Analytics allows the end user to answer the question that they



had in their head when they started, but it also allows them to ask the next question. Analytics allow business users to not only see issues but drill into them. Find the roots of successes or problems. So you probably aren’t surprised that I consider Analytics to be like

running in terms of consuming data and I consider it a thing of beauty. Kind of like watching my granddaughter sprint across the soccer field and score a goal. It's also a little scarier for those data parents in IT, because Analytics can't be done without a lot of input from the actual business users and without a lot of learning about the business processes by the IT staff constructing the analytics applications. Our data babies sure have grown, and very rapidly indeed. Where has the time gone?

[Tweet "Self Service Data Visualization will be to businesses what flying would be to humans."]

Fly?

If you consider how much we can accomplish simply by running just imagine what we as humans could accomplish by flying. Similarly Self-Service Data Visualization has that same great potential compared to just crawling with lists/static reports, walking with dashboards or running with analytics applications. Unfortunately for those of us in IT this goes against everything we've been trained to do. Everything we've spent our entire career perfecting ... controlling the data. Self Service Data Visualization means trusting others to do the right thing with the right data. Trust me when I say "that is as hard for data parents to swallow as it was for me giving my daughter's hands in marriage." But can you really blame IT for fearing that? For 30 years I've seen business users combine data from cocktail napkins, flat files, spread sheets and personal hunches then deliver numbers in a meeting that directly conflict with those before them. So have executives. Which is exactly why so many companies are stuck watching their data crawl, walk or run ... but never get to see it fly.



So what's the answer? In my humble opinion it involves a marriage between IT and the business community. We've all seen that in human marriages opposites attract. So why do we allow them to repel and work against each other in offices? IT has the staff to properly govern and protect the data to ensure a single source of truth. That has to be respected. The business community on the other hand has the knowledge about their processes that in most cases IT completely lacks. That also has to be respected.

Companies can continue to allow rebels do self-service from untrusted sources and continue to plummet to the ground as a result. Companies can continue to allow IT to completely control all access and enforce that all data requests have to be resolved by them and continue to plummet to the ground as a result. Or they can arrange a marriage between the two. One in which IT is trusted to provide a single source of truth data libraries where the business users can then serve themselves. One in which we see our "data babies" leave the nest and fly.

But hey what do I know, I think I'm the parent of a couple of trillion 0's and 1's.