

When corporate policies meet precision scientific equipment

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One of my colleagues used to work as an IT consultant, and one of his clients was a tobacco company. Since they were a tobacco company, the company policy on smoking was “You can smoke anywhere, any time.” “Anywhere” includes the labs. The labs with very expensive precision scientific equipment. My colleague told me that this policy meant that the company regularly replaced \$50,000 pieces of equipment after only a few months, thanks to smoke damage. But the company couldn’t change their smoking policy. Imagine the public relations disaster if a tobacco company had a no-smoking policy! Starting next year, cigarette maker Reynolds American will be a smoke-free workplace.

Bonus chatter: One of the researchers showed my colleague one of those pieces of expensive scientific equipment. The way my colleague explained it, “On the graph was a spike. The spike is what makes the cigarette taste good. It also is what kills you. The trick was to tweak the product in order to move the spike far enough to the right that people prefer the product over the competition, but not so far that you end up killing your customer base.” (Note that this was my colleague’s interpretation of what the researcher said, not the researcher’s actual words.)

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