

Strategy: Sock Solution

You know, there is a natural tendency, a human tendency, I don't know what kind of tendency it is, but we always like sexy things as opposed to unsexy things. I spent a lot of my life working on hospital safety, quality of work done in the hospital, and so on. And we talk about things that are shockingly important like electronic medical records and so on. But let me give you an example of something that makes an enormous difference that is really trivial. And I believe in any walk of life, healthcare or non-healthcare, these things are available to us in terms of change tools.

Now listen carefully to this story, because it's truly bizarre. This comes out of the U.K. If you're an American who's watching this, there are 60 million people in the U.K.; there are 300 million in the United States, five-times difference. So take the number and multiply it by five if you're an American. The British estimate that in their hospitals, on an annual basis, they could save 10,000 lives per year, deaths that are caused by deep vein thrombosis, which is common as dirt in a hospital. They could save 10,000 lives a year if every human being who went into a British hospital was simply given a pair of compression socks.

I've got a pacemaker, my heart doesn't work all that well. I take a blood thinner, but I'm worried about clots. I don't get on a plane or train without pulling on these stupid, ten-dollar socks. But think about that: 10,000 lives. I said to a hospital group, "Fire your surgeons and buy socks. And you'll end up with a better set of outcomes." Well, I'm not sure I exactly mean that. But in this world with MRIs and CT scanners and electronic medical records, all of which are important to the world—want to save 10,000 lives? Buy some socks. In the case of the United States, I guess, want to save 50,000 lives? Buy some socks.

You're not in the healthcare world, but there is always a sock solution that is astonishingly powerful, astonishingly unsexy. Think about it. Look for them. Become a maniac about the unexciting that has exciting results.