



Tech Tip: Built-in Obsolescence and You

By Director Samantha Schwarz

In recent years, have you found yourself saying “they don’t make things like they used to” more often than not?

[I’ll admit, this is where I feel a bit like Robert Preston as Harold Hill in a brown checkered suit dancing around the River City town square stirring up the locals. So, with less upsell, and, if you prefer, in the key of A-flat.]

Does it feel like manufacturers are starting to design products to fail on purpose after so many years, forcing you to buy another one of their products? If you’ve felt this way about one or more of the tech products in your life, you aren’t exactly wrong. From 2000 onward, there has been a trend of products having limited lifespans due to inability to repair the product following purchase, planned software abandonment or, more nefariously, building in intentional degradation of an element of the product. The name “Built-in Obsolescence” refers to the product having a purposefully frail design in which the manufacturer/developer knowingly releases and/or sells the product with a flaw that will cause the item to become obsolete after a period of time.

Now, with any conversation about built-in obsolescence, it is important to make two clarifications. First, batteries in general, as they are currently produced will (and always) have had a lifespan. Manufacturers generally have been looking for ways to improve them (i.e., such as for use in electric vehicles) rather than retaining their current lifespan status. Second, throughout the 20th century, there were cases of built-in obsolescence as well as poorly designed products that became the subject of built-in obsolescence urban legends.

So we got trouble, but it’s trouble with our technology—especially our cellphones.

While built-in obsolescence has gradually crept into many places as manufacturers and developers see it as a good way to consistently make money, it’s particularly prevalent in the cellphone market—so much so that there was a class-action lawsuit several years ago against Apple. Per the settlement agreement, Apple paid approximately \$25 per affected device to certain iPhone model owners following the accusation they had been “slowing down older iPhone models on purpose to compel users to buy newer models.” While the company admitted they did use software updates to slow down older iPhones (2017 and older models), they said it was due to addressing issues with the older lithium batteries.

While Apple has been publicly brought to task for its contributions to built-in obsolescence, this does not mean they are the only ones—Android phones aren’t the perfect solution. Part of the issue with technology that leaves us all with that “they don’t make things like they used to” feeling is that you can’t repair things yourself. You either (a) need a specialized degree in IT/engineering/etc., or (b) you just can’t. With a lot of phones, the issue is the latter.

Take a look at your phone. If it’s in a protective case, take it out (and clean it, if it’s been a while, it probably could use a good dust off). Now, take a look at it. Look for any screws or other obvious ways that it is being held together. If it’s an iPhone, there should be just two visible screws at the bottom. Now, if you were to unscrew them (please don’t), your phone would not suddenly fall apart like a scene in a film. You would have to pry it apart and (if you weren’t a technician) would most likely end up breaking the phone.

So what should you do to avoid built-in obsolescence or, at the very least, limit the impact that it has on your pocketbook?

First, do your research. Whether that’s checking out *Consumer Reports*, asking someone who you trust to be an informed source, or doing a little searching on your own, you want to be as informed as possible on what the current word is on the available brands.

Second, buying new is generally better. You want to buy the current/newest model or generation of a product as it will be equipped with the newest battery that will have the best lifespan, have the latest software updates and will have the software support available. Refurbished or “like new” products may come with extended warranties, but the batteries will not have the best lifespan (you don’t know if it was replaced or how the previous owner treated it). Additionally, buying a previous generation when a new generation has just been released is setting yourself up for being dropped from software support all the sooner than if you purchase the latest model if you intend to keep your device until it croaks.

Third, look at brand history and where it has trended. How a brand has worked in the past is not always a guarantee as to how it will work currently. Instead, you want to look at the overall trend of the brand. Do they offer repair centers/incentives? Are their products still in use years after they were put out? Alternatively, does the brand have a history of products needing to be replaced every (#) of years? Just because people aren’t complaining doesn’t mean it isn’t an issue.

In the end, buy the product you find to work best for you and when you find yourself beginning to say that “they just don’t make things like they used to,” don’t be too hard on yourself—because they really don’t.

Quilt Guild will meet on April 7

The Northeast Iowa Quilters’ Guild will meet on Tuesday, April 7, at 2 and 7 p.m., for its monthly meeting. The meeting will be held at the Bethel Presbyterian Church, 208 N. Vine St., West Union.

Wendy Smethurst, owner of the Happy Heifer Quilting Company, will present a trunk show for the program. Happy Heifer is located at 606 Rossville

Road in Waukon. The store opened in December 2025.

Wendy has been quilting for about 15 years and dreaming of her own business for the last few years. The shop sells Janome sewing machines and accessories and Arrow quilting furniture. She also has a selection of items for bag making, as well as fabrics for quilting. Originally from New Hampton, she now

lives in Prairie du Chien, Wis., with her husband and family.

The meeting can also be viewed virtually via Zoom, and the link will be sent out to members closer to the meeting date. For more information, please check out the NEIQG home page (www.neiqg.com) and the NEIQG Facebook page (Northeast Iowa Quilters’ Guild).



Adelbert “Butch” Whittle, a long-time resident of Monona, was recently honored by the Urbandale Public Library, where a curated selection of his woodworking items was displayed in the library lobby for the month of March. (Photo submitted)

Whittle’s woodworking displayed at Urbandale Public Library

Adelbert “Butch” Whittle, a long-time resident of Monona, was recently honored by the Urbandale Public Library, where a curated selection of his woodworking items was displayed in the library lobby for the month of March.

The pieces in this display are just some of the hundreds of items made by Adelbert “Butch” Whittle, 99 years old and currently a resident of the Walnut Ridge Retirement Community in Clive. He and his late wife Darlene, married for 79 years, moved to Clive 10 years ago to be near family in

Urbandale. Prior to that, they spent their entire lives in Monona.

Butch was a lifetime USPS rural mail carrier. Upon his retirement, he joined a local woodcarving group in Monona, led by the late Elmer Marting, in search of “something to do.” This display is just a small part of what he created after retirement. In addition to enjoying the camaraderie of the group that gathered each week at the Monona Museum, Butch expanded his interests in woodcraft to include toys, clocks and numerous decorative items.

Butch owned 47 acres of

hilled woodland overlooking the banks of the Upper Iowa River near Lansing. Over the years, Butch and Darlene planted hundreds of walnut trees by hand. Most of the walnut wood (and shells) featured in this display comes from trees he harvested, dried and planed. Butch also built many pieces of furniture from those trees. Butch made multiples of many of the items in the current display to ensure that his three children and their spouses, his grandchildren and great-grandchildren were all beneficiaries of his wood crafting legacy.

Garnavillo Public Library News and Notes

Home School Students Art Show

During April, the Garnavillo Public Library will host art work from local home school students. If you are home schooled and would like to display your creativity, contact the library at (563) 964-2119 or bring some items to the library.

Best Choice Save-a-Label

The Garnavillo Public Library is collecting “Best Choice” food and product labels as an ongoing fundraiser throughout the year. At locally owned, independent grocery stores, you will find more than 3,200 food, household and health and beauty products in the “Best Choice” family of brands. These products are national brand quality, and many are priced 10 to 20% below national brand prices.

Please support the fundraiser and drop off your labels at the library.

Memorials and Donations

Memorials have been given to the library in memory of Nancy Gull from the Gull Family; in memory of Roger Guyer from Ron and Jane Thein; and in memory of Sharon Larson from Ron and Jane

Thein.

Donations have been given to the library for the 2026 Summer Reading Program by Fidelity Bank & Trust, Peoples State Bank, Community Savings Bank, Icy Conditions and Cody and Samantha Brandel. The library has received trust money from the Norma Jean Warner Estate.

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