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for more information

For those of you who wrote to remind us that our references to the end of the millennium in the December issue were premature if we believe the math instead of the marketing, thank you, and please visit these sites: www.enigmar.com/2001
www.astronet.com/features&fun/millennium.html
www.georgian.net/rally/madness.html

Thank Goodness We're Not Dumb Animals

BACKTALK



Gosh, monkeys sure are dumb. Here is a case in point:

Five monkeys were in a room that contained a table in one corner, and a banana hanging from a string in the middle of the room. The monkeys figured out that if they dragged the table to the middle of the room, they could climb up and grab the banana. So they did. As one of the monkeys quickly hopped up and reached for the banana, hidden compartments in the walls suddenly opened, releasing high-pressure cold water that knocked the monkey off the table and drenched the other four monkeys.

They quickly learned that whenever one of them climbed on the table, all of them were soaked with cold water. They realized climbing on top of the table was a bad idea. Unbeknownst to the monkeys, the high-pressure cold water hoses were disconnected and removed.

The next week, one of the five monkeys was removed from the room and replaced by a new monkey. The new monkey saw the table and the banana dangling from the ceiling. Realizing that the banana was there for the taking, the monkey headed for the table. But fearful of being drenched by the high-pressure cold water, the other four monkeys pounced on the newcomer and beat the tar out of him. Every time the new monkey got near the table, the others beat him up. Soon the new monkey no longer went near the table.

By the third week, another of the original five monkeys was replaced by a new monkey. And like the monkey the week before, the newest member of the group tried to get near the table to move it over to the banana. Once again, the others beat up the newest member of the group. Even the first new monkey joined in.

Each successive week, one more of the original monkeys was replaced. The same thing happened every time; when the newest monkey attempted to get near the table, the others joined in to discourage him.

By the sixth week, not a single monkey was left from the original group. Not one remained that had been squirted with cold water. But when the newest monkey headed toward the table and tried to reach the banana, the other four monkeys "trained" him by beating the tar out of him.

If you could ask each monkey why it was beating up the new monkey, each probably would say, "I don't know, that is just the way we do things around here."

Pitiful, isn't it? Imagine a bunch of dumb primates that not only refuse to try new techniques, but attack, ridicule, or otherwise discourage other primates who try new things. Their only possible defense is that when they tried new techniques, somebody attacked, ridiculed, or otherwise discouraged them. So they continue doing things the old-fashioned way.

Gosh, monkeys sure are dumb. Imagine being unable to take a calculated risk and break an old behavior pattern to try new things!

—Dave Cook, C. S. Draper Laboratory Inc.

Got an idea for *BACKTALK*? Send an e-mail to backtalk@stsc1.hill.af.mil