I’m sitting in a quiet room at the Milcroft Inn, a peaceful little place hidden back among the pine trees about an hour out of Toronto. It’s just past noon, late July, and I’m listening to the desperate sounds of a life-or-death struggle going on a few feet away. There’s a small fly burning out the last of its short life’s energies in a futile attempt to fly through the glass of the window pane. The whining wings tell the poignant story of the fly’s strategy: try harder.

But it’s not working.

The frenzied effort offers no hope for survival. Ironically, the struggle is part of the trap. It is impossible for the fly to try hard enough to succeed at breaking the glass. Nevertheless, this little insect has staked its life on reaching its goal through raw effort and determination.

This fly is doomed. It will die there on the windowsill. Across the room, ten feet away, the door is open. Ten seconds of flying time and this small creature could reach the outside world it seeks. With only a fraction of the effort now being wasted, it could be free of this self-imposed trap. The breakthrough possibility is there. It would be so easy.

Why doesn’t the fly try another approach, something dramatically different? How did it get so locked in on the idea that this particular route and determined effort offer the most promise for success? What logic is there in continuing until death to seek a breakthrough with more of the same?

No doubt this approach makes sense to the fly. Regrettably, it’s an idea that will kill.

Trying harder isn’t always the solution to achieving more. It may not offer any real promise for getting what you want out of life. Sometimes, in fact, it’s a big part of the problem. Stake your hopes for a breakthrough on trying harder than ever, and you may miss your chance for success. Try smarter. Not harder.