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NO DECISION DECISIONS

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Quick Summary: Make decisions quickly and crisply to survive, thrive, and create a competitive advantage.

Abstract:

The all too often phrases of “Let’s wait until we have more information” and “Let’s assign a committee” are commonly used expressions to decide to make a decision NOT to make a decision. Rather than based on rational thought, these, and similar statements are made out of fear of making the wrong decision. Some caution is always prudent. The operative word is “some”. Crisp and timely decision-making, not procrastination, needs to be the norm and not the exception.

I often use the tongue-in-cheek statement: “I have patience; I have lots of patience; in fact, I have more patience than most people. I just don’t have time to use it!” I usually follow this statement with, “Let’s make a decision and then move on.” Another similar fun statement to make is to answer the question: “Do you have a tough time making a decision?” The answer is: “Well, yes and no; sometimes!”. Finally, the title of this article highlights the notion that no decision is a decision in itself.

The common theme of these statements centers on the difficulty most of us have in making decisions. Our fear is that once made, the decision eliminates alternatives. That fear is certainly true. However, the important corollary is that one can move on once a decision is made. The problem is exacerbated by the fact that rarely are decisions clear-cut. Using yet another one-line statement, “Clear-cut decisions are usually made by people with dull knives.” Finally, at the risk of going overboard: “There are few one or zero, binary issues. Instead, most issues are represented as either 0.49 or 0.51”. The purpose of using these generalized statements is to help create a rationalization and urgency in making decisions as soon as possible with the information that is available. Waiting for the “last” bit of information or considering every conceivable situation rarely adds quantifiable data that alters the basic facts that are initially and readily available.

It is likely that the reluctance to make quick, crisp decisions has always been with us. With today’s 24-hour news cycle and the readily available, supposedly expert critics, second-guessing seems to have been raised to a new art form. As discussed in the articles on Principle One: Stay in Business, the reality is that someone will put you out of business. The only choice that one has to make is whether it will be your own company or someone else’s. The reluctance to make decisions with a wait-and-see attitude often results in a wait-and-lose situation. Like a shark that needs to keep moving to bring oxygen through its gills, companies must keep moving forward, knowing that their competitors and markets are constantly evolving. Survival may depend on moving forward equally fast.

Rarely are individual business decisions fatal. Instead, as decisions are made and time and circumstances change, the appropriateness and effectiveness of the decision will become more obvious. Instead of attempting to wait, the approach should be to make decisions with the following mindset: "This decision is final until a substantial reason become obvious, and then we will change it." This is not a paradoxical statement. Instead, it reflects the fundamental premise of Principle Six: Promote and Maintain a Positive Response to Change. As uncomfortable as this approach might seem to some individuals, the concept that "The only thing that is constant is change" was first stated by Heraclitus, a Greek Philosopher in ~500BC!

As a final comment, make decisions that allow decisive action that is easy to explain and implement. Not only should you act like a shark by keeping moving forward, but you should also attack issues as aggressively. In addition to helping you to survive, it will also help you thrive. Sharks have been around for over 400 million years! It certainly has worked for them. Make decisive decisions work for you.