

Wrong decisions can be learning opportunities

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The old saying is that nothing is as certain as death and taxes ... but I am adding one more certainty – we are all going to make mistakes.

Being in business means that we have to be decisive; we must make decisions and having to make decisions inevitably leads to occasionally making the wrong decisions. Getting it wrong does not always mean the end of the world! It is important that we are not prevented from making choices simply because we fear to make the wrong one. A successful person is one who has made many incorrect decisions ... but who has learned from these mistakes. The true failure is someone who has failed to learn.

Recognising that we have made a mistake is the first step to learning this process, we need to understand why our choice of action was unwise, and usually our mistake will come from one of three factors:

1. We have made a misjudgement – we may not have adequately appreciated all the factors in the situation.
2. We had not adequately planned our process – and this is often the most obvious mistake. Short term solutions can create long term problems if we have not fully considered the outcome of our choices. Thinking a solution through to its ultimate consequence takes time; and there will be a number of variables which may need to be considered. But time taken in this part of the decision making process can be beneficial in the long run.
3. We have not implemented the decision effectively. Along with planning how our decision is to be implemented, the actual implementation can be troublesome. Short cuts can be disastrous, time constraints can mean that we are tempted to miss out important tasks.

What is important is analysing what went wrong and profiting from the information, and reformatting the decision to be successful.

So what went wrong? Why did it all go pear shaped?

Some helpful questions may be useful – questions like~

1. Was my reading of the situation correct? What assumptions had I made?
2. Had I considered all the possibilities?
3. Was the timing right?



4. Did I provide the appropriate personnel and resources to implement the proposed decision?
5. Did I communicate satisfactorily to all involved?
6. Did I maintain a check on progress?
7. And of course, what was the main cause for the failure?

I am sure that other questions will occur to you to cover your situation.

Next we need to consider what action we can now take to remedy the situation and this time our planning and our decisions need to be based on the outcome of our self-questioning technique. So ~

1. Re-examine what the first decision was designed to achieve. What can you salvage from the mistake?
2. Consider all the options available to achieve the desired outcome; and consider the probable consequences of these options, before deciding on the one most likely to succeed.
3. Work out your detailed plan to implement this decision.
4. "Fool proof" it – look for all possible outcomes which may not move you forward. How can these be implemented in a positive manner.
5. Take some care in working out who needs what to make the action successful.
6. Communicate to all concerned the details of the plan, and their part in it. Check for understanding.
7. Maintain a watching brief and check that the plan is working correctly, and modify if necessary.

Mistakes happen, and most of us will spend a lot of time trying to avoid blame. But to be result focused is the true way to approach a decision that isn't working and the main steps are to accept that an error has occurred, work out the reasons why it did, and most importantly admit that the mistake has been made. Admitting an error is not an admission of failure if it can be shown that lessons have been learned from it.

The worst possible outcome is to ignore the fact a mistake has been made, doing so re-enforces bad practice. Understand that mistakes are learning opportunities and use them to examine weakness both in decision making and implementation. Nothing is so bad that something cannot be learned from it.

