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Do You Practice Active Decision Making?

By Martin Avis

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Many years ago when I was young and callow, I received an invitation to attend a 'Decision-Makers' conference. Trouble was, I couldn't make up my mind whether to go or not. I didn't.

As the French proverb says, "Between two stools, you sit on the floor."

Like a great many people before and after me, I had to learn the hard way to actively take control of my life. Prevarication is a poor master, but one that will rule you with a rod of iron if you don't chose to stop it.

Banish from your mind and your vocabulary the words, 'I'll think about it.' You won't. Something else will take your eye and divert your attention. Unless you make a positive decision to do or not to do, right now, you are very unlikely to revisit.

Nobody ever became a success by hesitating. Success comes to those who jump in and have a go.

I am not by any means suggesting that you should embrace every hare-brained scheme or half-baked idea that you come across. Far from it. What I am saying is that you must develop the skill to actively decide what to do in any given situation and not leave the result to chance.

Do You Practice Active Decision Making?

For example, I get about 200 emails a day. Whenever I go to my inbox I have to make quick choices about all the emails waiting to get my attention:

- Send it straight to trash
- Save it in a pending file
- Read it immediately
- Forward it to someone else
- Act on its contents

There may be other choices, but the point is made. If I don't actively decide between these options I would

very quickly get an inbox so full that I would never get the chance to act on any of them.

Life and business is very much like that. In this twenty-first century we live in, only those who have mastered the art of 'keeping up' can survive and thrive. There is no room for procrastination.

Very often the only decision you need to make is whether to act or not. Once you have made that positive commitment to yourself, the 'putting into action' part of the equation follows naturally.

Don't over analyze.

Often, the biggest hurdle to cross in reaching a decision one way or the other is the fear that you haven't considered all the options. Forget it! Unless you are being forced to decide something completely outside your field of experience you already have all the information you need. Your brain has spent years sucking in data from all over the place. Let that incredibly complex computer weigh the options for you in the background. Your subconscious moves much faster than your conscious thought processes.

There are two kinds of decisions.

The first kind are those that cannot be reversed. You have to take longer over these, but there is still no value in putting off the inevitable. In these kinds of decisions, a maybe is the same as a no. You will have

Do You Practice Active Decision Making?

decided by default. If it all goes wrong then, you will be at fault twice – once for not deciding at all and once for allowing the wrong outcome to happen.

The other kind of decisions account for the vast majority: those that can be changed, modified or adapted after they have been made. There is never any good reason to put off actively making these decisions.

Go with your gut instinct. 90% of the time it will be right. Even in the times it isn't, you can reverse it pretty quickly. Don't be frightened of losing a little face. In business, someone who has the guts to make a decision, and then, in the light of new facts, the courage to decide to reverse it, is someone destined for the top.

Don't think too far in the future.

Some situations try to force you to decide based on the outcome in the long term. This is rarely sound. Of course, the long-term objective is valid, but if it bankrupts you or the company in the short-term, that decision is flawed.

When to avoid making a decision.

After all I have said about the power of positive decision making, it might seem odd to condone the opposite. However, it is just as valid to decide not to do something as to decide to do it. The important thing is to decide.

Some questions are unanswerable and sometimes you simply don't have enough facts to make an informed decision. In these cases, your active decision is to wait, gather more facts, or seek advice. 'Do nothing' is not an option.

I leave the final words to two successful businessmen from opposite sides of the Atlantic:

'If I had to sum up in one word what makes a good manager, I'd say decisiveness. You can use the fanciest computers to gather the numbers, but in the end you

Do You Practice Active Decision Making?

have to set a timetable and act.' Lee Iacocca, former Chrysler chief.

'A lot of companies I deal with seem incapable of making a decision. It doesn't matter if the decision you make is right or wrong. What matters is that you make it and don't waste your company's time. If you make the decision, you begin to distinguish the good from the bad.' Peter Kindersley, UK publisher.

Martin Avis is a management and training consultant. For an unfair advantage (+ 6 free gifts) in business, Internet marketing, and personal success, subscribe free to his weekly newsletter, BizE-zine. <mailto:subscribe5@BizE-zine.com> or visit his website at <http://www.BizE-zine.com>

Using Emotion for Persuasion

By Robert F. Abbott

The other day, I received the last issue of a business magazine before my subscription runs out. Now, I like this magazine, but I'm swamped with reading matter so I won't renew.

Of course, I've received many reminders and offers about renewing; magazines try very hard to keep the subscribers they've got. So when the last issue came with a special promotional wrapper on the cover, I wasn't surprised.

But, what made this one interesting was a clever piece of copy that hit an emotional chord: inside the back cover of the special wrapper were the words, "You're about to be dropped from our list of active subscribers. Unless you act now."

Personally, I thought it was an effective piece of copy (even though I still won't renew). It made an emotional case for what is essentially a business-to-business offer.

Many people who write persuasive copy, whether in sales letters or internal memos, say the rest of us underestimate the power of emotion in getting the response we want from our messages.

There's a sort of rule of thumb that goes like this: Consumers buy on emotion and justify on reason. In other words, we, as buyers, think we're being rational in making a decision to purchase, or in choosing among different offers, but in reality we make the decision with our hearts and then justify that decision with our reasoning powers.

In the case of the magazine copy, I was about to be dropped — Imagine! Me being dropped! — from the list of active subscribers. I'm not sure what active subscribers are: do they also have passive subscribers? But, the meaning comes through. I'm about to get dropped from an exclusive club unless I act now.

Do You Practice Active Decision Making?

Which is where the emotional factor kicks in. Who wants to be dropped? Isn't that like being in high school again and not wanting to be excluded from a popular group? Isn't there an eternal desire to belong?

With this appeal to my insecurities and ambitions, the copywriters have forced me to think about my decision not to renew. I can't just make a 'business as usual' decision; it must be a personal as well as business decision. And when a message gets 'personal,' it demands more involvement from the reader or listener. More involvement, in turn, means more attention to the message, making it more persuasive.

If you sell, this idea won't come as much of a surprise. But, if you try to influence behaviors in other ways, you may wish to add emotion to your communication toolbox. It's something you do by getting 'personal,' by tapping into the hopes, fears, or aspirations of those with whom you're communicating.

Of course, we must use emotion ethically and responsibly. If you plan to use it, step back and ask yourself how you would respond if someone else directed that kind of a message to you. That's always a simple but helpful litmus test.

Robert F. Abbott writes and publishes Abbott's Communication Letter. Each week subscribers receive, at no charge, a new communication tip that helps them lead or manage more effectively. [Click here for more information:](#)

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