



MONDAY MOTIVATOR

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Taking Action

Most of us tend to leave well enough alone. If there's never been a fire concern in the barn we don't bother with the effort or expense of installing sprinklers. If every NASA space shuttle launch up to now has been without failure we don't bother to listen to engineers telling us it's too cold to launch a billion-dollar mission this morning. From Katrina to Fukushima, there's a long history of catastrophes that people saw coming, but still didn't take action.

“Successful people maintain a positive focus in life no matter what is going on around them. They stay focused on their past successes rather than their past failures, and on the next action steps they need to take to get them closer to the fulfillment of their goals rather than all the other distractions that life presents to them.”

Jack Canfield – Co-Author *Chicken Soup for the Soul*



In the business and executive coaching work that we do here at Performance Strategies, we see examples of inaction quite often. Sometimes the inaction comes from procrastination; other times it comes from lack of knowledge and at still other times it comes from fear of getting it wrong. We took an interest in what the key causes are for doing little or nothing until a real problem crops up. Here's what we found, not in the order of frequency, just the order we thought of them:

1. “I'm waiting for help.” If you are running a business and thinking that you have to have one or more staff in addition to your current staff you may be adding to your problem. By putting the solution off you are effectively doing nothing. It's like saying you can't open the door without the key. Break the door down if that's what's required to take the next step.

2. **“The conditions aren’t right.”** We have seen a few situations where business owners are slow to make decisions because the conditions were not to their liking. The problem with this thinking is that conditions will never be completely right. Very little in business is standing still. Conditions are in a constant state of flux. It’s better to take some action now rather than wait for conditions to change. At least you will have demonstrated leadership and this is better than doing nothing.
3. **“This setback proved it’s not possible/not worth it.”** Sometimes a company will use any setback to validate inaction. Ask yourself if any setback was used as a reason to do nothing and hope the setback does not happen again. We’ve seen companies that will analyze a possible solution to an issue only to decide that the effort or cost would be too high for the marginal benefit it provides. Most of the time this logic is flawed and results in further damage to the company mission.
4. **“I picked the wrong path... I should try something else.”** When we see that a company has taken some action, even if it’s not the best of all possibilities we also see that the process of trying something else tends to get the same time-consuming analysis the first step took only more of it in an effort to avoid the first mistake. Time is money. Taking action is all about solving problems, not waddling in them. We recommend that business owners take action that may very well involve bringing other subject matter experts into the picture and allowing them to do what they do best. If you accidentally swallow something poison are you going to wait until you pass out or get yourself to an emergency room?
5. **“I don’t know where to begin.”** Perhaps this is the most common “excuse” we see for keeping the status quo. In order to reduce the time to swim a lap the 23-gold medal Olympic champion Michael Phelps hired a coach to teach him about fluid dynamics that changed the way he cupped his hands on the downstroke and change his hand shape on the upstroke. This was learned from watching films of how birds use their wings. Mr. Phelps started with a coach. When you think you don’t know where to begin, start with a well-established business coaching firm. At least you’ve started somewhere, which is preferable to doing nothing.
6. **“Nothing I do will make a difference.”** This type of thinking is typical of small business owners who feel that it’s too expensive to bring experienced talent to the problem. Thus, what happens it what Einstein said when he uttered that now-famous statement “You can’t solve a problem with the same thinking that created it.”
7. **“I’m overwhelmed.”** On occasion, we see business owners who have let tasks get further and further behind to a point where taking action seems undoable. In one case, we know of a business owner who has many months of invoices that need to be processed. But as long as there is enough money to cover the expenses and the time to process the invoices gets longer and longer, doing



nothing seems to be the best way to handle it. Even the best business coach would have to lead the horse to water AND make it drink. We can all see the problem here but somebody has to take action.

8. **“I’m not making any progress.”** This is more of a weak excuse than a real issue for putting off taking action. If a business owner feels that progress is not being made then perhaps several things need to change. Even if that’s the case, at least one thing needs to change now. That one thing is the thinking that doing nothing is the right decision.
9. **“I’m trapped.”** Business owners who feel trapped are there because their accumulated decisions were not strategic, they were tactical. In other words, short term fixes seldom address longer term needs. One of the reasons for having a business coach is that you’ll have a collective reasoning that keeps you from making decisions that only benefit you here and now but not in the next few weeks or months where it matters most.
10. **“It’s below me…” or “I’m too good for that.”** On occasion, we see situations where a business owner will not take action because of a title or a to do list that does not allow him or her to be the solution provider. This is fine as long as SOME action is taken. Those NASA space shuttle disasters are good examples. (On January 28, 1986, the NASA shuttle orbiter mission STS-51-L and the tenth flight of Space Shuttle Challenger broke apart 73 seconds into its flight, killing all seven crew members. Then again On February 1, 2003, the Space Shuttle *Columbia* disintegrated upon reentering Earth's atmosphere, killing all seven crew members.) What is now known is that there were many warnings about the possibility of these disasters but the culture at NASA was: “if so many were aware of the possibility surely someone was doing something about it.”
11. **“I need to know more.”** This is by far, the most common “reason” to put off taking action that we see. The old adage of “paralysis by analysis” lives here. Some business owners will allow a bad situation to spiral down to a very costly reality while waiting on one more report, one more spreadsheet, or one more opinion. Taking action NOW is better than waiting on data that very likely will only add a few percentage points to the sure benefit of taking action later.
12. **“I’m so drained from my existing obligations.”** When a business owner is wrung out or simply overworked it’s time to bring in a new mind to address the reality of taking action versus doing nothing. But using the excuse that you are not able to focus on one more thing will allow your problems to be validated for all the wrong reasons.
13. **“I am taking action!”** Some business owners will tell us that actions are being taken now and that solutions take time to work. We get that. We also get the view that if a business owner



needs to turn north to fix the problem but s/he thinks turning in ANY direction is the fix then the outcome will be random. As our founding partner Will Robertson likes to say “There are no victims in a bowling alley. The ball goes where it is thrown.”

14. “I don’t have the right resources (money, equipment, connections.)” When we see business owners with this mindset we often suggest creating a spreadsheet to show the economic consequences of allowing this excuse to drive the inaction that further exasperates the situation. With adjustments, a solution can be found to stop the problem from becoming worse.

In summary, taking action is THE most important skill a business owner / leader can bring to the office. Without it a business might succeed despite the inefficiencies of operations, sales or customer service, but sooner or later, the real cost of inaction will catch up to you. By that time, it may be too late to fix the problem. If you can’t see how to pull it off then call your business coach and work it out together.



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your ducks in a row and sometimes it’s reminder that a few details need your attention. In any case, it’s a great snapshot of your personal business transition or exit readiness. For your FREE assessment and 12-page report: <http://www.exitmap.com/ps-mcg/>

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