

Ease and Do[©]

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Tough Decisions

...it's not about pleasing everyone!

I was a Board member of a small (approximately 250 members) Chamber of Commerce. We had endured some tough fiscal times but had emerged as a viable entity. Even then we knew that our future was uncertain and following considerable discussion and review we opted to merge with a larger Chamber. As we soon discovered, though our tough decisions may have been the best choice for the organization, they're also a source of fear and loathing; at least for some.

The old adage, "you can't please everyone" is constantly reinforced in times of change. Our Chamber sought to move from a fund-raising model to one of giving back. After all that is the purpose of a Chamber- to serve its' community. Following our decision to merge there were a few folks that expressed their dissatisfaction; still others seem to have faded away.

The benefits of growing our Chamber are considerable. We've acquired another 750 or so members; our representation has blossomed from 2 to 16 communities. The sheer quantity and variety of events has tripled and for many the need to be a member of multiple chambers has been eliminated; that alone is a significant cost savings. Members now have an opportunity to meet new people and expand their business visibility.

This process has reinforced some very important lessons: 1) running a business is not about being popular and 2) tough decisions have to be made. We thrive on support for our decisions and we actively seek outcomes that will satisfy the majority of folks but it doesn't always work that way. As leaders we need to be comprehensive in our approach to decision making; decisions based upon popularity are emotion-based and are difficult to sustain and nurture. So what are we supposed to do?

Think Large- even when the decision seems small!

When faced with tough decisions it's critical that we acquire a broad perspective of the issue. Decisions that seem small in scope often have far-reaching impact. Taking the time to scope out the ramifications of our decisions leads to more effective solutions. This should not be viewed as a means to please everyone but rather a well-balanced way to arrive at the most desirable outcome.

Respect- earn it!

In business, we make tough decisions all the time. Earning the respect of our employees and colleagues is an on-going task. If we come from a place of integrity, if we genuinely listen and acknowledge, if we embrace the 'who' and 'what' of those around us, we will earn their respect. Though we cannot make everyone happy all the time, we can foster their ability to appreciate change if we first earn their respect.

Don't Shy Away from Tough Decisions- embrace them!

Tough decisions aren't going away so why not embrace them! When we make tough decisions we plow through a challenge or obstacle that otherwise would have held us back. At the root of every tough decision is an opportunity.

Above All- remember your mission!

When tough decisions are to be made, keep your mission at the forefront. Decisions, no matter how small, should be aligned with our mission. This sort of continuity breeds sustainability and confidence. In the case of our Chamber we explored a number of options. We simply could not ignore the fundamental reason for our existence; nor could we ignore that staying as we were, we could not meet those expectations. Faced with our inability to fulfill our mission, we grew confident that our decisions, popular or not were right for our members.