

LESSONS LEARNED | BY GERSON ROSENBLIOM

Analysis Paralysis

Last month, I addressed some of the difficult business decisions we find ourselves making on a seemingly regular basis. I mentioned one of the more ironic aspects of this process: that decisions seem to get more perplexing the longer we're in business. This month, I'll take a closer look at this aspect of decision-making and share lessons I've learned that helped streamline my thinking and move me to action.

With the economy sputtering along, it's only natural to put more weight on decisions. In a positive business climate, we can get away with an occasional poor decision. But with today's pressures, we take every decision so seriously that we get the cold sweats at the prospect of doing the wrong thing. It reminds me of a basic tenet of sports psychology. When players get into slumps, experts blame it on a player's focus. Baseball players who focus on their last strike tend to swing and miss. Likewise, focusing on our last poor decision handcuffs us.

Another aspect of decision-making is the experience upon which we draw. The longer we're in the business, the more we learn. When I was a neophyte in the music industry (back when dinosaurs walked the earth), I often made decisions based on limited knowledge and experience. I don't believe I was ever irresponsible. I did my homework and learned the key issues that helped lead me to the right decision. But I hadn't experienced every nuance that could go into the thought process, so I made more simplistic assessments. They say ignorance is bliss. I suppose I was living proof of that adage.

As the recent recession hit and I found myself on the downward slope of a tiring business, I became almost incapable of making decisions. It's not that I was making bad decisions. I often made *no* decisions for fear that they'd be the wrong ones. I suffered from a classic case of analysis paralysis.

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But positive thinking isn't enough in times of rapid change. More than ever before, I've become a great data collector and a strong proponent of research. Every tough decision is made drawing on enough empirical data to allow objectivity of the issue at hand.

Once you have all the data, let it intersect with your positive thinking. That important crossover point is your gut instinct. With data as a backdrop for sound decision-making, trust your intuition and feel for what works for your company. There were several years when I stopped letting my keen instincts have an impact on my decisions. If your fear of hard times is keeping you from making necessary moves, realize that inertia can become a huge contributor to your problems.

The final piece of this puzzle is always plotting your escape path. Few decisions are irreversible. Include a plan of action you will follow if your decision proves to be the wrong one. Otherwise, you're just being reckless.

With a well-balanced combination of gut instinct, carefully culled data and responsible planning, you may surprise yourself as you see forward progress for the first time in a long time. **MI**

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BREAKING THE CYCLE

Now that all of that is behind me, how did I fix it? For starters, despite the tough job of closing a business, I remembered that I had decades of stellar success. Like the ballplayer focusing on strikeouts, I had neglected to consider every home run that I'd hit. So, I allowed myself to remember my feelings of success and focus on them. I committed to "working toward the win" — a process that involves doing whatever it takes to get from where you are to where you want to be after you've made that great decision.