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Actions speak louder than decisions

If you have taken a decision and informed your boss of what you and your team are going to do, for your career's sake make absolutely sure it happens.



If you haven't started the action plan, you may as well not have made a decision.

I've a friend who's an elderly painter and decorator. His children have moved on and he now has no dependents. He does not want to retire altogether but he does want to have more time for himself; but he's finding it difficult to cut down the amount of work he does. Unfortunately for him he is brilliant at his job and a very nice chap to boot. This means that his old clients all turn to him when they want work done and he finds it difficult to say no. Plus, his relatives and friends have been used to asking him over, giving him good food and drink and getting him to do some decorating.

Over coffee one day he asked me what I meant when I murmured that a decision is not a decision until there is commitment to the action plan and the first steps are taken. I asked him what he wanted to do in the spare time he was trying to create, and he rather coyly admitted that he had decided to take up golf. He then tried to implement his decision. He resolved to take every Friday off to pursue this new

Here's an
idea for
you...

Pick a team member who has difficulty with the 'do it now' concept. He tends to agree to a decision made by you, himself or the team, and then finds loads of reasons why he can't implement it. Sit him down and tell him the story of the painter. Now get him to take a decision he has been prevaricating over and put the actions into his diary. Phone him just before and just after he should have started to implement the decision.

Defining
idea...

'Men of action whose minds are too busy with the day's work to see beyond it. They are essential men, we cannot do without them, and yet we must not allow all our vision to be bound by the limitations of men of action.'

PEARL S. BUCK, American writer

hobby. Four weeks later he told me that he had not been able to do that once. I pressed him to commit to a lesson with the professional on the next Friday morning and another one that afternoon. We agreed that he would pay for the lessons in advance. This broke the deadlock and he started to play. He is now an addict and plays every Friday and quite often on other days as well - but it wasn't a decision until he'd gone into action.



NEVER DISAPPOINT THE POWERS THAT BE

Right, where is this stuff important? Most teams work with some operational targets that they need urgently to achieve. If your team is well organised you'll also have a strategic plan that includes a series of projects aimed at improving the environment in which you operate. If you implement these projects, life will become easier and performance will improve. Being career-minded you will, of course, have told your boss all about the changes the team is going to make – perhaps with a loud drum roll. But in the real world pressure is always on maintaining performance rather than developing new methods. In my experience a boss will ask three times how you are getting on with the new idea. The third time they hear your excuse that unfortunately there just has not been time to get it going, they will forget it and write you down as all mouth and no trousers.

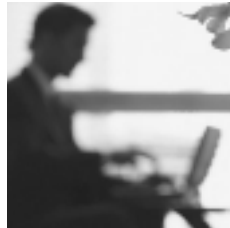
If you need to remind yourself about team strategy have a look at IDEA 18, *Don't play tennis with a cricket bat.*

Try another idea...

'My choice in everything is to say nothing and go do it.'

LOU GERSTENER, American consultant and executive, CEO of IBM among others

Defining idea...



How did
it go?

Q **Right, I got this bloke into my room and we discussed the fact that at our monthly team meetings he has never done any of the actions in the long-term plan. He could only agree and we put some very specific dates in his diary. He did them. Within a week or two major problems occurred on his patch. When I asked what had happened, he replied that he was following my instructions and so was busy with a new project as the storm gathered. That's why he had dropped the ball.**

A You probably have a quite different problem here. If he deliberately turned his back knowing that issues would arise, he is sending a loud signal. Whatever he has said about the activities in the long-term plan, he does not believe that they are the right things to do or possibly that he has the skills and knowledge to do them. In other words he is not actually committed.

Q **You're quite right about this.**

A Thank you.

Q **My team and I have so many half-started and half-finished bits and pieces lying around that they have lost interest in doing them at all, and I have lost credibility with my boss. How do I kick-start the important ones?**

Q You've answered your own question. Go through the activities with the team, pick the important ones and throw all the others out. Sometimes when you are planning it is as vital to decide what not to do as it is to decide what to do.