



How to Stop Spinning Wheels

by Chanon Collins

for Allen Pritchett & Bassett, LLP

Do you ever feel as if you work and work and work, but you never seem to accomplish anything? If so, you are not alone. Many people experience this tedious phenomenon to great avail. Jeffrey Pfeffer, a Business professor with Stanford University, has conducted much research on this painful activity and has a few bits of advice to get you back on track.

Professor Pfeffer has penned a text offering advice for correcting this lackadaisical vacuum. Pfeffer's book, **The Knowing-Doing Gap: How Smart Companies Turn Knowledge Into Action**, includes many methods for implementing effective work habits. Pfeffer believes that "knowledge is only useful if you do something with it." Many companies are quick to form study groups or send employees to seminars and workshops to gather information on how to improve or enhance the business. What value does the gathered information have if nothing is every done with it? At some point in time, people will have to stop talking and start doing.

Pfeffer also believes that "doing means learning and learning means mistakes." If companies want to empower their employees to think and work on their own, the organization must examine their message of accountability. Is your organization one in which when a mistake is made, the greatest mission at hand is to identify fault? Or is your company more concerned with correcting the problem and learning how to prevent it in the future? Take a look at your company's message of accountability for your employees. If you will be held accountable for every single mistake, how willing will you be to take a chance with an idea? Would you be willing to convert your ideas into actions?

This element of fear seems to be invading companies of today. Employers are frightened by the thought of inefficiency, yet the process of learning is based on trial and error. Obviously if a new idea fails too many times, the idea and/or processes must be examined. The point is to allow people the experience of learning, trying, and succeeding.

Another reason for static in the workplace is the power given to a decision. Pfeffer states, "A decision is the beginning of the process of doing, not the end of the process." It is one thing to make a decision, but it is another thing

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to do something about the decision. The best piece of advice to give someone would be to “do something!” David Kelley, founder and CEO of Ideo Product Development, believes “enlightened trial and error outperforms the planning of flawless intellects.”

Perhaps you have heard one of your employees tell someone “that’s how we’ve always done it around here.” Spinning wheels are created when companies take their policies, processes, and procedures for granted. Pfeffer has developed an unusual management theory called the “Otis Redding Theory of Measurement.” He believes that companies that have created ineffective methods for measurement force activity to stop. Pfeffer calls upon Redding’s famous “Sittin’ On the Dock of the Bay” song to illustrate that if an employee can’t do what 10 people are telling him to do, he will probably do nothing.

Businesses must make knowing and doing the same thing. Pfeffer urges people to create a “culture for action.”

Do not let spinning wheels become a permanent fixture in your business.

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