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Critical thinking skills smooth issues, decisions

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Full Text:

Q We have identified issues we would like to resolve in our business before they get out of hand. What is the best way to do that?

A Use basic critical thinking skills to analyze and evaluate problems and ultimately implement the fix.

In my last column, I wrote about the need to analyze a problem or situation before implementing any changes to your business. This column addresses how to resolve issues through the development of critical thinking skills.

To begin with, think of critical thinking skills as a sorting process of all the factors that relate to a given issue. Among many CEOs, owners and managers that businesses and shareholders depend upon, the skill of critical thinking is becoming a lost art. If you are among those who are not in the habit of using critical thinking skills, you need to master this systematic approach to problem solving.

This systematic approach involves the development of some basic skills. Let's take a look at five of these skills.

First, ANALYZE or INTERPRET the information presented or through your own discovery sources. This step is often referred to as the sorting of relevant information. Deal with factual information and discount non-supported arguments. We all can get caught up in the moment. When that happens, step back and put your critical thinking hat back on.

Second, SEEK ADDITIONAL INFORMATION. Don't rely on the information presented to you. Do your own investigation of the facts. Seek out sources so you may gather objective, fact supported, subjective, historical, and current data from as many sources as possible. Sometimes this exercise will uncover other non-related issues in your business that will also need your attention.

Third, EVALUATE. Taking the data from steps one and two gives you the best information possible to make an informed decision. Your conclusion is supported by that research. It is also supported by your experience and your ability to judge the information. Paramount in the evaluation process is a skill best described as your moral compass. This means your decision is based on what's best for the company, its customers, and its employees. Integrity and critical thinking go hand and hand.

Fourth, AFFIRM YOUR SOLUTION or OPINION. If your decision affects any processes within your business, or any customers or employees, it will need to be presented in a positive, well thought out, well informed manner. If you are challenged, you will be the most knowledgeable person as a direct result of the time you took in steps one through three. This part of the skill level of critical thinking is sometimes referred to as the 'explanation.' It allows you to present the information restated in a clear and concise format.

Lastly, the fifth skill is the IMPLEMENTATION or EXECUTION, of your decision. Once a decision is made, it is critical to monitor the issue after it is implemented. Envisioning a plan and its consequences is part of the Critical Thinking process. The outcome can only be accomplished by monitoring your decision. Remember the old saying, "it's what you inspect not what you expect."

I leave you with these final thoughts. Critical thinking, because it involves in depth research along with a high degree of discipline, will improve your successful decision ratio. Once it becomes a habit, it not only becomes part of your professional life, it will become second nature in guiding you in your personal decision making process. Start today and elevate your critical thinking process.

Dave Murray is a retired CEO, COO and vice president of sales and marketing, now living in Wenatchee. In 2014, he joined SCORE to give back some of the business experience he has learned. Central Washington SCORE, 5 S. Wenatchee Ave., Wenatchee, can be reached at 509-888-2900, email score663office@gmail.com or see www.centralwashington.score.org.

SCORE updates

The Central Washington Score Office is relocating to a new address effective April 1. The new SCORE office will be located at 5 S. Wenatchee Ave., Suite 330, Wenatchee. Same telephone, 888-2900.

The next SCORE workshop, "Insurance For Your Business, Fact and Fiction," is April 14. To register call 509-888-2900 or send an email to score663office@gmail.com

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