

Excuses to do nothing are usually just no good

By Francie Dalton

Ever make a suggestion and encounter only negative responses? Ever caught yourself responding to the ideas of others with the same “impossibility” thinking?

Whether from weariness, fear or the lure of complacency, we’re all sometimes guilty of not taking initiative when we should.

Here are the five most common ways we try to justify inaction, with suggestions for outthinking and overcoming each.

1. Nothing is wrong — usually heard when some form of assessment is recommended.

If measuring customer satisfaction is suggested, the response is: “But our customers must be happy because they aren’t complaining.” If an employee survey is suggested, the response is: “But our employees must be happy because turnover is low.”

In response to suggestions that leadership assessments be done, you’ll hear: “But our quality of management must be good because what needs to get done is getting done,” or “We must be doing well because profits are up.”

The fundamental premise here is that there is no apparent reason to assess, so why assess?

To discredit this, begin with the observation that absence of evidence isn’t evidence of absence. Just like preventive medicine costs less than medical treatment, it is better to be proactive than reactive. We must ferret out risk, identify vulnerabilities while they can still be prevented. The alternative is post-impact damage control.

Next, point out that if nothing is wrong,

then that’s all the more reason to assess. Being able to provide employees, shareholders or customers with documented evidence of how wonderful everything is will be a great public relations move.

2. Something is wrong, but shhhhh. Typically propounded by those who don’t cope well with any form of confrontation, this myth typically sounds something like: “No one is screaming at the moment, and we aren’t suffering any consequences at the moment, so even though we know that something is wrong, let’s let sleeping dogs lie. And besides, who wants to be the one to point out that something is wrong?”

Beware of such faulty logic. It’s like trying to justify never taking your car in for service because it’s running just fine.

To overcome this myth, acknowledge that the truth can indeed be frightening but point out that early diagnosis increases the likelihood of recovery and reduces the cost.

3. Nothing will change anyway. This is the voice of the defeatist. “We’ve tried to initiate change before, but we always get shot down, so it’s clear that our leadership doesn’t want to change.”

If this is the myth you’re facing, you must realize that it’s true — nothing will change — that is, not until someone decides to advocate strongly for what “should be.”

Someone must be willing to become the internal champion. If that isn’t you, which person in your organization might you approach to take on this role?

Alternatively, don’t hesitate to start by taking a few baby steps. Initiate change in one department or one subsidiary. Maybe you could collaborate with colleagues to pool resources and inaugurate change.

4. It’ll cost too much. Seemingly a very

reliable excuse. I daresay that absolutely any initiative can be totally squelched by the voice that says: “Our budget is tight, and we just don’t have the financial resources.”

While that may be accurate, it’s all too often an excuse to halt needed change. When that’s the case, the following suggestions might help expose or at least circumvent the myth.

Could the elements in the suggested change straddle two different fiscal years? Or could some of the steps be completed by personnel rather than using a vendor? Finally, it’s possible that the old axiom “pay now or pay more later” could be a sufficiently compelling argument.

5. Transition at the top is imminent. As an excuse for not taking on any new initiatives, this one is almost unbeatable: “Our president is about to leave; now isn’t the right time for us to undertake anything new, not until the transition has taken place.”

Conducting assessments before leaving the big chair demonstrates a fiduciary commitment to the organization, and the person taking over will appreciate the information that flattens the learning curve.

Rather than being deflated, disabled or demoralized by those five myths, learn to recognize them for what they are and refute them.

FRANCIE DALTON is founder and president of Dalton Alliances, a full-service business consulting firm in Columbia. Phone: 800/442-3603 Web site: www.daltonalliances.com