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CHUCK TALK: Show me a perfectionist and I'll show you a procrastinator

While waiting for that perfect time, problems fester, opportunities slip by

BY CHUCK MACHE

My work last week had a real theme to it. Let me try to flush it out for you.

I was discussing with one of my clients the value of having an offsite strategic planning session. I was encouraging him to get the executive team together and make certain that everyone was of one mind when it came to the critical challenges, major goals and key strategies that the company was going to work toward in the coming year.

"I don't know if we're ready. We need to have our team running perfectly before we have an offsite meeting," he said. It got me to thinking about his decision-making process and what I believe to be its real meaning.

A few days later I was sitting in on a sales meeting that a manager was conducting with his team and they were talking about major opportunities in the region.

One of the sales reps said, "I'm just waiting for the perfect opportunity to approach them." There it was again. This felt like a similar type "anti-action taking" statement to the one that the executive made about the strategic session.

Then as my week was closing, I was involved in a planning session with my client and his team and we were going through a process that identified why customers were and weren't buying. One of the participants was interjecting only when they felt compelled to correct what other individuals had said. This person would start sentences with things like, "Well, that's not exactly correct" or "We had better be perfect if we're going to bite off that goal."

And there it was again, the word perfect. Now I agree that timing is very important as it relates to decision making, leading, managing and selling. There are times that you absolutely don't want to do things. For example:

1. Don't ask people to spend money when they're in the process of cutting back – unless there is a cost-saving benefit.
2. Don't have a meeting on expansion when the company is in contraction – unless you've solved the core issues on the reasons why the company had to cut back in the first place.
3. Don't have a company meeting during peak hours if it is going to affect servicing the client at that particular moment – unless you have a backup plan that is seamless to the client.

But in those examples, I'm just talking about common sense timing issues. None of it is about being

perfect, because if I focus on doing things perfectly I will never get anything done. At the end of the day, there usually isn't a perfect time to do anything. There are just times that are better than others.

Imperfect action-taking

In fact, I would argue that you can create more opportunity, more momentum, more enthusiasm, and get more things done if you don't worry so much about being perfect. Give me imperfect action-taking behavior any day over waiting and waiting for the perfect moment.

This is what I think about behavioral thinking that waits to take action at the perfect time. For the most part, the wait doesn't have anything to do with perfect timing. In many cases, I believe it is a smokescreen to an underlying issue, and that issue is fear; a fear to take action. By waiting for the perfect time, there is a built-in excuse that allows for procrastinating behavior. This is especially true when it comes to difficult people issues, tough client issues or unpleasant-yet-required business changes.

If you are a leader or manager, and you feel like you have to wait for the perfect time to meet with your team to discuss some very challenging issues – don't wait, just do it. You'll be surprised at your successful outcome.

If you are in sales and you've been waiting for the perfect time to reach out to a potential client that really needs your services and could change your financial picture at the same time, don't wait, pick up the phone and get a meeting scheduled. You'll figure out what to say after you get a meeting on the calendar.

Don't let perfection get in the way of moving forward. If you've been waiting for the perfect moment, take action now. You'll feel better. I know this article isn't perfect, but hopefully you found a pearl or two. That would be almost perfect.

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Chuck Mache, president of Chuck Mache Communications, is a speaker, executive coach and consultant. His work is dedicated to helping companies and individuals break through to their next level. He is also the bestselling author of the "The Four Kinds of Sales People: How and Why They Excel and How You Can Too." Learn more and sign up for Chuck's complimentary monthly newsletter at www.chuckmache.com.