

Two Questions that Eliminate Organizational Clutter

By: Pat Lynch, Ph.D., President

One of the reasons for accumulating organizational clutter is that people are afraid to get rid of things. All kinds of scary implications come to mind: What if we discard something we later need? What would people think if we discontinue this program? What if that is the wrong program or process or structure or action? Rather than reviewing what we have and what is needed, we take what often seems to be the easier course of action and just add on to what is there. The result, of course, is an inability to optimize business results.

There is a simple tool you can use to do away with some forms of organizational clutter by allowing you to confront the fears that prevent you from releasing things that no longer serve you or the organization well. It consists of asking and answering these two questions:

1. What is the worst thing that could happen (realistically) if we did XYZ?
2. Can we live with that outcome?

For example, what is the worst thing that could happen if you confront an employee who is not performing? Perhaps he or she would sue the organization. How likely is that scenario though, particularly when there is no legal basis for the action? A more plausible outcome is that the person will be unhappy, and perhaps will leave. Can you live with the loss of a non-performing employee?

My observation is that people often blow their fears way out of proportion. Thus it is important to be realistic when considering what the worst thing that could happen would be if you take, or fail to take, a given action. Consider the *likelihood* that this outcome will occur as well as the *risk* that it poses to the organization.

In my experience, once the anticipated negative outcomes are examined realistically, they generally turn out to be quite acceptable. In fact, they often result in positive outcomes, though people may not have considered them because they were so focused on the negatives.

I challenge you to take one fear that could be preventing you from dealing with an aspect of organizational clutter and ask yourself the two questions above. Your answers could be liberating! ➔

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