

The Time Delay between Mental and Physical Creations

by Dennis Hooper, copyright © 2009, published in the *Houston Home Journal* on February 28, 2009

Hey, I'm tired of being cold! How about joining me on an early spring break getaway? I've checked out the availability of airline tickets, and I've found a good deal on a hotel room. Let's go!

If you were to join me on that vacation, can you see that you'd have to do at least a little planning? At a minimum, you'd have to decide what to pack, and that would depend on how long we'd be gone, right?

Everything we humans create, including a spur-of-the-moment departure, is created twice, first mentally, and then physically. The focus of today's article is the size of the time delay between the first creation (the idea) and the second creation (the physical execution).

A lot of people have never even considered that what they create occurs in two steps. The mental creation rarely receives the credit it's due. We have a tendency to remember the physical creation only. Yet the mental creation is critical to any successful effort!

In my work with leaders, I usually conduct a skills assessment to determine the individual's strengths and limitations. One of the attributes we measure is "action-oriented." Individuals who rate high in this characteristic are full of energy for the activities they see as challenging. They seize more opportunities than most. Such individuals are not fearful of acting with a minimum of planning.

An "action-oriented" individual typically has a small time delay between the mental and physical creations. Once the idea takes hold, this person executes whatever behavior is required to make it happen.

Though considered a positive attribute by most leaders, people who are action-oriented may experience some negative consequences. They may have to do some rework because they failed to consider all the contingencies. Their results may not be as all-encompassing because they failed to do the front-end calibration and conferencing required to include everyone in the plans.

Had they chosen a different option, perhaps the outcome might have been more satisfying. They may forget to include some critical tools or relevant steps along the way. Sometimes, spending a bit more time and mental creativity in generating a comprehensive plan can yield a more beneficial return for the time, money, and energy invested.

Some individuals, however, are really good at planning and considering all the possible alternatives. Before they create anything physically, they'll generate multiple options and imagine what the various outcomes might be if they choose each one. They'll rule out the possibilities that have a low probability of yielding a productive outcome, and they'll establish contingency plans for each of the potential problem areas. These individuals are helpful on teams, but they may insist on analyzing everything to death!

I've just provided two extreme versions of the time delay that exists between the mental creation and the physical creation. Most of us have been at either extreme at one time or another. We know what it's like to jump into something too quickly, and we know what it's like to be stymied into inaction by the uncertainty of not knowing for sure the best approach.

I deal with both kinds of leaders in helping them build their skills. Action-oriented individuals don't want to spend the time to plan their improvement approach. They look for good ideas and want to implement each concept right away. They lose the balance and completeness that a sound planning approach can bring.

Some individuals, however, never seem to get around to execution of their plan. They want the plan to be as thorough and complete as they can possibly make it. They don't want to miss an opportunity that could contribute significantly to their progress.

As with other aspects of leadership, balance is important. Finding the right balance? Ah, that's the key!

Now, let's get back to that sunny getaway! Some of you may already be headed for the airport! Others may be disappointed I didn't share more details about my plans! Ah, but all of you want to go, right?

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