

How to navigate paradox when making business decisions

As I work with leaders and their teams, I am often struck by the role paradox plays in struggling with business decisions. For example, my colleague Joanne and I were playing around with the idea of creating a Leadership Academy. We were wrestling with the paradox that we wanted this academy to be both a small-group experience and yet include a lot of people.

One choice meant close connections among a small number of people; the other involved a wider circle with fewer deep connections. There was no simple answer to our quandary.

I agree with H. L. Mencken who said, “For every complex problem, there is an answer that is clear, simple and wrong.”

Many decisions involve dealing with paradoxes; few situations lend themselves to black or white solutions that work on all levels.

Here are some ideas that may help when you're struggling with a business decision.

Notice and appreciate the paradoxes

As I pick my way through complex decisions, I find it helpful to look at the major paradoxes in my thinking when figuring out what route to take. It's about trying to find the right mix of getting both to fit whatever situation I'm trying to solve.

Here are three paradoxes that I frequently encounter. Maybe you face the same ones. Hopefully, they will spur your ability to recognize the paradoxes you face and help you sort out how to solve problems.

Paradox 1: Fast and slow

Hurry up and slow down. Hurry up because you've only got a certain amount of time to live. Life is short, and you want to squeeze the juice out of it. “Hurry” gets you places and spurs you to accomplishment.

Slow down because if you're going too fast

you won't notice yourself and your life. Slow down because mindless doing isn't life at all, but just doing. “Slow” connects you to what's around you.

Paradox 2: Tasks and relationships

Check off and check up. Check off tasks on your to-do list. Get things done. Follow up and follow through. Be efficient because your desk is caving in with projects you're working on and loose ends to tie up. Getting tasks done is good for business.

Check up on the people you care about. Build new relationships within your own company and the businesses you serve. Have conversations. No check list here.

Without relationships, you have no projects. You can become lonely. Relationships are the fire and fuel that build thriving businesses.

Paradox 3: Big picture and small details

Look up and look down. Look up and see the bigger picture. Understand the context. Step back to see where you've been and where you're going.

Look down to notice the details. Draw closer to discover the beauty and see the pattern in the minutiae. Fine tune what's there.

Have Joanne and I figured it out? Not yet. We're still wrestling with the paradoxes. And we both appreciate the struggle.

Please send me the paradoxes you encounter in your life and work.

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Nicki Weiss is an internationally recognized Certified Professional Sales and Leadership Coach, Master Trainer, thought leader, speaker and facilitator. Since 1992, she has trained and coached more than 20,000 business leaders, sales teams and reps. Nicki has a particular passion for working with manufacturers, distributors and rep firms in the electronics industry.

Nicki is ERA's sales consultant, the brainchild and facilitator of ERA's free teleforum programs and the founder of the SalesWise Academy. Every day, leaders wake up knowing that they, their technical reps and field sales engineers need to sharpen their focus and their skills. But they don't have the tools, resources or patience to continually help enhance their strategy, communication and relationship building skills. The SalesWise Academy fills that void and delivers those skill-building lessons. To learn more, go to saleswise.ca or call 416-778-4145

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