

Can you afford to do today what you did yesterday?

Dr Ian Brooks wonders why business owners are reluctant to adopt new ideas and failing to meet customer expectations.

There are many reasons why we do what we do, but the poorest of them has to be, "Because that is the way we always do it".

If that was a good reason for doing things, we would still be lighting fires by rubbing two sticks together!

Saying you are doing something because you have always done it may be the feeblest of justifications, but it is the one I hear most often. I was having a haircut the other day and was in a hurry. I wash my hair every morning, so was a little irritated at the time wasted washing it again. I asked the hairdresser if customers had to have their hair washed before having it cut. "I don't know," said the young girl. "That's the way we always do it."

Even well qualified professionals are guilty of using this reasoning. I asked a professional engineer why his quote was GST exclusive when things sold to consumers always include GST. "I don't know," he replied. "That's the way we always do it."

We live in a rapidly changing world where change is the only constant. For many years it has become accepted wisdom that what worked for us yesterday, might make little difference today and could be the cause of our downfall tomorrow. Yet we persist on doing the things we have always done. If that was not bad enough, we continue doing them without questioning why.

For business owners and managers, the problem is even more deeply entrenched. Because we are comfortable with the status quo, our initial instinct is often to reject new ideas.

Think about it. What's your first reaction when someone in your team suggests a new way of doing things? Do you say to yourself, "This is great, we should be finding new ways to do things?" Or, does

your subconscious say, "Doing something differently takes effort and could be risky?"

Customers are becoming more demanding each year and intellectually we know we will not meet those new expectations by doing what we did yesterday. Yet because we feel comfortable with what we know, and because we fear the unknown, we stick with what we've been doing.

How do we get ourselves out of this rut?

“Change is like a steamroller. If you're not up there driving, you are destined to become part of the road!”

Six steps for change

The first step is to understand that changing is not optional. Change can be defined as what you must do when you cannot keep doing what you are doing now. With our customers becoming more demanding, who can keep doing what they have always done? What delighted your customers yesterday can be your death tomorrow.

One way you can convince your staff of the need to change is to hold a staff meeting where three or four customers talk about what you do well, what you do poorly and what they expect.

The second step is to have a clear picture of what in your business needs to change; how these things must change and how these changes will benefit your customers. You must paint this picture to get your people to follow you.

The third step is to have a clear plan about how to get from where you are to where you want to be. Because your staff are at the coalface, they will have some very good ideas on this. An additional benefit is that change happens best when staff are involved.

The fourth step is to set targets. Without targets you have nothing to aim for and no way to measure progress. What do you hope to achieve and by when?

The fifth step is to communicate. During a period of change, people need information about what has been accomplished, what is happening now and what lies ahead.

The final step is to celebrate success when you do achieve a milestone. It does not have to be a major event, just recognition of a job well done.

If you do not want to implement the major change programme above, you could bring about change simply by managing your business in a proactive, rather than reactive, way.

For example, instead of requiring somebody with a new idea to convince you that you should be doing something new, ask your staff to justify why they are still doing what they have always done. After all, we know our world is changing everyday so why are we still doing the same old thing?

Remember, change is like a steamroller. If you're not up there driving, you are destined to become part of the road!



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