

## **Think You Can**

There are times when we are faced with challenges that are completely outside the realm of our control. Situations such as these are often confronted by attempts at damage control, seeking not to resolve the problem, but minimize the negative fallout. The question then becomes, what criteria did we use when we concluded that a specific set of circumstances are beyond our control?

Aside from the children's book of the little train that, while hauling weight above it's capacity, climbs the hill by repeating to itself "I think I can...I think I can", most of us have been programmed to reflect on the problems and not the solutions. Our instinct is to point out what is wrong with a situation, an idea, or a new initiative. We are by training naysayers and firemen, putting out sparks of excitement before they get the chance to spread into mass hysteria.

### **Why Are We Like This?**

There are a number of theories on why people tend to focus on the negative. They include:

1. We are frightened of failure and think if we point out the problems we will be on record as saying the project had no chance from the start.
2. We are overwhelmed by challenges and unable to cope with them.
3. We are jealous or competitive and use criticism as a means of neutralizing someone else's accomplishments.
4. We are insecure and think that being critical covers that up.
5. It's easier to point out the problems than it is to discover the solutions.

Whatever our reasoning, focusing on problems tends to reduce participation, stifle creativity, and drain the energy and enthusiasm of the company. In other words, emphasizing the negative is not particularly positive.

### **Pushing Toward Excellence**

Creating unnecessary obstacles or presenting minor or irrelevant criticisms is unhelpful. Having said that, creating constructive, challenging debate is a necessary and desirable part of the business creation process. The only way to drive people to excellence is to make them be as good as they can be. This often means they need to be challenged. There is nothing at all wrong with confronting people with challenges to their concept as long as the reason is to improve the idea, not defeat it. This is the primary differentiating factor between positive and negative criticism. Keep it in mind and make sure your critical comments are for the purpose of pushing the project – and the lead individual – to excellence.

### **Countering the Nay Sayers**

What can you do to counter the nay sayers and the criticism that comes from poor intent? There are a number of tactics you can utilize. They are:

1. Set an Example – make sure that you are always constructive in your approaches to other people's ideas. Make sure you communicate your purpose

- and the logic of your challenges. And most importantly, offer not only the problems you perceive, but also some possible solutions.
2. Set the Rules – when you are beginning a process of review make sure you set the rules of the process, explaining to everyone that your expectation is for constructive criticism. You need to communicate the purpose of the review – which is the improvement of the idea, and that you expect not only a discussion on the problems, but also recommendations for solutions.
  3. Cite History – there are scores of examples in the history of business that demonstrates how nay saying drove companies to miss tremendous opportunities. Come armed with similar tales of defeatist victories as close to your particular industry as possible and use the stories to emphasize how much negative thinking really costs.
  4. Be Graceful – sometimes the best path to victory is by conceding a small defeat. Make sure you don't become defensive while your project is being assailed. Moreover, be ready (but not eager) to concede points even when you could argue them through. Remember, your purpose is to be pushed to excellence. You need to take the criticism in the proper way so that you are able to improve through it. When the punches come, roll with them, and roll gracefully.
  5. Be Brave – the greater challenge we impose on ourselves is our own fear of criticism. Don't be afraid to listen to someone's idea and recognize it as not only a good idea, but perhaps even a better idea than the one you had. This takes tremendous courage, particularly in a business environment, but your commitment needs to be to excellence, and sometimes excellence comes from others.
  6. Think You Can – most important of all, think you can. When the nay sayers get going they can sometimes convince even the most committed that their idea doesn't stand a chance. Have faith in your idea and believe in it. Then make others believe in it too.

The reason this article is called "Think You Can", and not "Know You Can" is because we need to be aware of the fine line that separates unwavering determination and blind stubbornness. You need to have the drive to make your vision into reality. You need to have the backbone to take the criticism and not fall victim to the nay sayers. While this is all true, you also need to have the wisdom and soundness of thought to recognize the truth should it become apparent that your good idea – while it is a good idea – is, for whatever reason, not feasible.

So think you can. Listen to the critics. Create solutions. And in most cases, you can.

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