

by Mike Hawkins
mike@alpinelink.com



Are you quick or slow to take action? Consider there are two types of people in the world. There are those who are bold and action oriented. Then there are those who are reserved and measured. The former are quick to decide often preferring to leave the implementation details up to chance, or leave them up to others to decide. The latter are more concerned about how things get done. They prefer to have a detailed plan. Which is better – the action taker or the thoughtful planner?

Successful people and great leaders in particular are proactive. They are action oriented. They don't merely wait to react to what comes at them. They make decisions rather than defer them. They are quick to decide whether or not to engage an opportunity or solve a problem. They know the negative impact of wasting time and putting matters on hold.

Action oriented people often make decisions based on instinct which can be barely better than the flip of a coin. They spend little time evaluating alternatives choosing instead to pick one and get started. They figure they can change course later if needed. Neither do they worry too much about the potential obstacles ahead. Their mindset is that they will deal with obstacles as they come up.

Therefore you might conclude that action oriented people fail more often than reserved people, but hold that thought. Because action oriented people's acts are of *commission* rather than *omission*, their acts are observable. The reality is that those who don't take action miss as many opportunities for achievement as those who take action and fail. While you can't see acts of omission because no action was taken, not taking action can be just as much a failure as taking an action and failing.

However, reserved people are successful too. Because they think opportunities through in more detail, plan out their implementations, and find ways to reduce risks, their actions are more organized and efficient. As long as their actions are taken before it is too late, their actions are typically completed more quickly and at lower costs. Their actions are more likely to become best practices and the basis for repeatable systems.

Which of these two approaches are better? There are clearly benefits to both planning and taking action. So wouldn't it make sense to do both? If you could pair two people on a project, wouldn't you want one of each? As long as they both appreciated the other's abilities instead of feeling annoyed by them (i.e. they didn't kill each other), you could get the best of both. Or what if both qualities could be developed in one person? Can these differing qualities coexist? The answer: absolutely.

People can be action oriented, but measured. People can take risks, but also mitigate them. People can move quickly, but also take time to consider obstacles and workarounds. People can create implementation plans that coordinate resources without spending a lot of time planning. People can follow their instinct, but also review data and consider the facts.

There are “bet your business” decisions that deserve thoughtful decision making as well as less important matters that don't. Having the ability to make quick decisions as well as take a more measured approach are both valuable tools to have in your proverbial tool belt. When you have both, you can use whichever is the right one for a given situation.



The “Go Do It” versus “Create a Plan” Mentality

If you are typically slow to make decisions or take action, consider adding the tool of decisiveness to your tool belt. Or if you are typically too quick to make a decision, consider adding a more thoughtful approach to your tool belt.

Here are a seven principles to follow in being action oriented, yet thoughtful. Note that the first four are quick, but important assessments to help you decide which approach to take:

1. Assess the impact of the opportunity or problem you are addressing. If the impact is relatively small, don't waste a lot of time on it. Make your decision and move on.
2. Assess the feasibility of changing course after you take action. If you can change course afterwards with little consequence, don't waste a lot of time thinking about the course to take. Pick an alternative and take action. If you need to change course, do so when needed.
3. Assess the impact of deferring or not taking action. Understand that making no decision is still a decision. If the opportunity is significant but short lived or you are holding up important matters, recognize the need to take action. Have a sense of urgency. Make this matter a top priority.
4. Assess the risk of taking the wrong action or making the wrong decision. If there is considerable risk to your organization, your reputation, or other stakeholders, recognize the need for thoughtfulness, research, data collection, and planning.
5. For the decisions that deserve a thoughtful approach, identify and evaluate the most feasible alternatives available. Collect any available data that makes the evaluation as objective as possible. Conduct the necessary research and due diligence. Before deciding, establish the criteria by which you and your team will evaluate the alternatives, e.g. lowest cost, highest performance, least risk, longest lasting. Using your agreed upon criteria, evaluate and select the best alternative to pursue.
6. Jointly create an implementation plan with your stakeholders that includes milestones, key actions, owners, and due dates.
7. Take action and implement your plan.

Use and allow these seven principles to become engrained habits and enjoy the ability to be action oriented, yet thoughtful.

Article written by Mike Hawkins, award-winning author of *Activating Your Ambition: A Guide to Coaching the Best Out of Yourself and Others* (www.ActivatingYourAmbition.com), author of the *SCOPE of Leadership* six-book series on coaching leaders to lead as coaches (www.ScopeOfLeadership.com), and president of Alpine Link Corp (www.AlpineLink.com), a boutique consulting firm specializing in leadership development and sales performance improvement.

For other articles on reaching your peak potential, visit:

www.alpinelink.com/Leadership_Sales_Management_Consulting_Papers_Tools_Templates.aspx