

When Does Persistence Become Foolishness?

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When is it time to give up on something? When do you stop pursuing a customer prospect, investing resources into a project, or striving to earn a promotion? When do you walk away from a negotiation or quit trying to make a relationship work? Do you give up when you get frustrated? Or when you've tried everything you know to try? Or when a better option becomes available? How do you know when your persistence goes from an asset to a liability?

Persistence leads to many successes but at some point can become foolishness. Persistently pursuing a customer prospect who will never buy or investing in a project that will never fulfill its desired outcome can be a waste of time and money. You can miss many opportunities while tirelessly investing energy into a dead-end job or relationship.

Knowing when to stay the course, change course, or quit isn't easy. Knowing when enough is enough isn't always clear. The best strategy isn't always certain even after the dust has settled on a situation and time has gone by. Hence regrets remain for many people who tried for too long as well as for those who gave up too early.

To help you when deciding whether to continue, stop, or redirect your resources, ask yourself "Did you

- Truly give it your best? Did you perform your best and to a level of excellence defined by most objective standards?
- Try every reasonable alternative? Did you try direct and indirect, formal and informal, cheap and expensive, individual and team based, or whatever reasonable approaches were relevant to your situation?
- Give it sufficient time? Did you practice patience and allocate enough time for your efforts to be recognized, evaluated, and acted upon? Did you allow enough time for emotions to calm down and sound logic to settle in?
- Consult with people qualified to give you advice? Did you seek wise counsel from people willing to challenge your thinking rather than merely talking to people who validated your thinking?
- Manage your biases? Did you think objectively rather than rely on your instinct replete with its subjectivity? Did you recuse yourself in areas you had a conflict of interest or couldn't be objective?
- Look in the mirror? Did you take your share of responsibility for the issue? Did you work on being a better employee, sales person, project manager, boss, or spouse? Did you identify and correct the areas you had control over that contributed to the impasse so you aren't merely running from yourself?
- Think through the consequences? Did you fully consider the pros and cons including the tangibles and intangibles before changing course or giving up? Did you consider the financial impact as well as the impact to your reputation and stress level?



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- Use rational thinking as well as your feelings? Did you follow both your mind and your heart? Did you evaluate the facts and statistics as well as the impact on people? Did you understand the true source of your emotions before acting on them? Did you consider the unique nuances of your particular situation rather than blindly follow accepted norms?
- Develop a better alternative? Do you have another alternative that offers a better outcome or a higher return on your effort?

If you can't honestly and objectively answer "yes" to these questions, take action on those topics you can't. If you can answer yes, consider it time to redirect your resources. You may be in a hole that is only getting deeper with time. You may be wasting your energy and money. Your persistence may be at the point of foolishness. Change your strategy, tactics, or approach. Or pursue your better alternative.

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.

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