

Avoidance at Work

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How many times have you asked someone to complete a specific work task, make a decision, make a change, or have that tough conversation and it just does not get done or takes much longer than should?

Why do we avoid tasks at work, making decisions or giving difficult feedback?

“It’s been a busy period” or “I just haven’t had the time” or “I have been waiting on another department for information” or “I didn’t know it was that important.” After discussing reasons like these we may find that they are in deed valid, however there are often underlying individual and team motivators that are not being engaged or there may be skill gaps that have not yet been identified and bridged.

And what of the costs? Reduced productivity, people acting on poorly constructed data and information, loss of a client, frustration and disengagement among team members, to name just a few.

Here are some reasons people avoid at work:

1. Avoiding work tasks

- It’s too far out of our comfort zone and we need some direction
- It’s not going to add value to the organisation
- We are over loaded and afraid to say ‘no’
- We have mastered the task and are bored

2. Avoiding making a decision

- We do not have all the information and need to collaborate and consult more
- Our gut is telling us something is not right and we do nothing
- It’s just not that important to us

3. Avoiding making a change

- There is not a compelling reason
- The change does not serve our needs

4. Avoiding having a tough conversation

- We don’t want to make matters worse
- We don’t know how to say it
- We don’t have all the facts



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There are neurological explanations to the question of why we avoid certain tasks or responsibilities at work. Put simply, there are things that we prefer to think about and act on and there are those that we don't. One way of discovering our thinking preferences is through mapping them using the scientifically validated work done by Herrmann International, creators of the *Whole Brain® Thinking Model* and the Hermann Brain Dominance Instrument (HBDI). The HBDI graphically illustrates how we prefer to think and therefore act both under normal conditions and while under stress.

The *Whole Brain® Thinking Model* is a metaphor for the brain and distinguishes thinking preferences into 4 quadrants: the logical, factual thinker; the organised, detailed, sequential thinker; the interpersonal, feeling based, kinesthetic thinker; and the holistic, synthesizer, integrating thinker. By learning what we prefer we also learn what we least prefer. This helps us understand why we avoid thinking a certain way and doing tasks that require us to do that type of thinking. How many times do you hear “that’s enough of the detail” or let’s not get bogged down in the minutia”? Such comments are likely being expressed by someone who has more of a strategic thinking preference than the person delivering the detail. Thinking about and therefore doing least preferred tasks and responsibilities requires a hell of a lot of energy. The Brain uses 20% of our body’s energy and so this has implication for our resilience on the job.

Tips for dealing with avoidance:

1. Have a coaching conversation with the person or persons involved to get buy-in and identify any obstacles or skills gaps
2. Learn what drives and motivates your staff and assign work that utilises their strengths
3. Ask for feedback on how you delegate tasks to ensure you are tapping into peoples preferences
4. Design a decision-making framework to help staff make better decisions
5. Role-play difficult conversations and plan for them
6. Hold others accountable through follow-ups and giving feedback, and hold yourself accountable by receiving feedback and assigning yourself an accountability partner.

Now take a moment to think about and answer the following:

- A) What am I avoiding or putting off right now, and what is the first thing I need to help me act on it?
- B) Who in my team or organisation has been avoiding a task or decision? Then have an open conversation with them to explore what the obstacles may be and how to move forward.

Acknowledging avoidance and acting on it sooner will reduce its power over us, raise energy levels, and increase productivity and job satisfaction.



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