

Good Decisions Lead to Strong Businesses

People going into business always are interested in tips on being successful.

While lots of tips are available online and in writing, one commonly seen tip is: Make good decisions, and do it consistently.

“It may seem obvious that successful business owners are good decision makers,” says (Insert name and title) of (Insert county). “In reality, though, being a consistent good decision maker is not always the case.”

So how can a small-business owner be a better decision maker again and again?

The literature on developing a small business provides tips on how to make good decisions on a regular basis.

Probably the first key is to do your research.

“If you don’t know the options or even fully understand the problem, you are taking a chance in making a decision,” says Glenn Muske, the North Dakota State University Extension Service’s rural and agribusiness enterprise development specialist. “It isn’t efficient or even possible to know all of the options, but you certainly need to have determined what many of them might be.”

“This key is tricky because some owners get stuck right here, thinking that without finding all of the information, they can’t move,” he continued. “This just means deadlock, which maybe the worst decision of all.”

Balance between too much and too little information is tricky to find. It’s a skill that comes with time.

Another key is being open to the full range of options. Don’t prescreen or be selective in those options you like or think will work. This is a great time to have someone take an opposite view on every option. Have a good, honest discussion so you do not leave out one you personally might not like but that might be the best route to take.

“We always tell small-business owners that they need a mentor,” says (Insert last name). “But remember, a good mentor is willing to not always agree with you. Mentors need to be willing to take and defend an opposite view.”

You also must think long term. Every decision made puts you on a certain path. Do some future thinking about where that path might lead and future decisions that may result.

A final tip is to remember that a past good decision may not be a good decision now. The situation is never the same. Time, along with internal and external factors, changes the scope. So do not necessarily go back and repeat past decisions.

“Past decisions are a great resource,” says Muske. “But repeating them may cause substantial damage to your firm if you haven’t considered the situation and the information available today, and haven’t projected future consequences.”

Long-term strong businesses are built on solid decisions. As the owner, you know you will not always make the right decision. What is crucial, though, is that you avoid decisions that may slow or even hurt your business.

For more help, check with your local Extension Service office at [insert phone number and email address]. Also visit NDSU’s small-business support website at www.ag.ndsu.edu/smallbusiness and sign up for the monthly newsletter. Or check out Facebook at www.facebook.com/NDSUextsmallbiz or Twitter at @gmuske. Another online resource is www.eXtension.org/entrepreneurship.

Joining groups such as your local chamber of commerce can be helpful. The Small Business Administration and its related organizations, such as the Small Business Development Centers and Service Corps of Retired Executives, also can be valuable resources.

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For more information, contact glenn.muske@ndsu.edu or call (701) 328-9718. You also can visit our website, www.ag.ndsu.edu/smallbusiness.