

How To Avoid Tough Decisions

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Silence is golden. Ignore the question totally. This works out fine when the question comes in the mail. Just don't answer the mail. Don't even acknowledge it. Do the same to all the reminders too. This is the first line of defense in a public sector organization.

If the heat starts mounting because of 'No Response' strategy, acknowledge receipt of the letter of complaint, but don't do anything further. Now you have as much time as you enjoyed before adopting this strategy.

For persistent reminders, respond by saying that the matter is under consideration, and you will inform the complainant about the decision when it is made. But don't make the decision at any cost.

When the pressure from the complainant gets to be too much, you are forced to take some action. Then you should set up a committee to look into the matter. That should give you 6 months to three years. In that time the pressure tends to wane.

If the results of the committee's work are not satisfactory, or there are some points of dispute not resolved by the committee, feel free to set up a subcommittee or two. That postpones the decision further.

Files tend to gather dust with time. In big organizations the dust and the files underneath don't move without incentive, usually in form of special green paper. If you don't want a particular file to move, it will never move. If the file becomes a pain in the backside, it can be lost permanently. Get it lost. Now the complainant is forced to start all over again.

If the problematic issue is in the form of a confrontation, and you feel you may lose, divert attention to another issue. This new issue should be somewhat related to the original issue. It should be confusing enough by itself, so that a lot of time will be required to study it. Then the main issue gets side-tracked successfully.

As long as you remain on the defensive, the complainant keeps going strong and keeps finding ways of bothering you. But once you launch a counterattack, he goes on the defensive. You have to keep finding ways of bothering him/her, so that he/she remains on the defensive. Your troubles cease to be completely, or are at least lessened considerably in intensity.

If demands are made by your subordinates and you want to say 'No', say 'No'. They will request, plead, beg. Say 'No!' firmly. Usually they don't bother you further.

Demands made by labor unions are tricky. If you say 'No', they stop work. If you don't give way, they may cause physical damage to property and physical harm to you. So you have to be diplomatic. The first step is to negotiate. In simple English, negotiation means haggling. If the result of your haggling is affordable, accept it. If it is not, bribe. The union leader is a mere human being, and may be susceptible to temptation. If he/she accepts personal gain in exchange of cessation of labor trouble, do it. If that doesn't work, tell the union that you will accept the decision of the labor court. You anyway are obliged to accept the labor court's decision, but saying so makes them feel they have won a point. That gives you time. If you lose in the labor court, see if you can afford to accept the decision. If you don't, think of moving to an appellate court.