

## Dither

The dictionary defines the word dither as both a noun and a verb. As a noun, it refers to a trembling or vibration. As a verb, it means to act irresolutely, to vacillate. In electronics, a relay is said to dither when it bounces rapidly from one position to another, without settling in a stable position. It is a very undesirable condition, usually caused by inadequate voltage to the coil. In other words, chaos caused by poor input.

How might this concept apply to business? It is no coincidence that Mr. Dithers was Dagwood Bumstead's boss in the Blondie comic strip.

Although not widely recognized as such, dithering is commonly observed in many organizations. It happens when action is delayed. We search for additional information, wait for management approval, agonize over a plan, or pause, not quite sure how to handle something.

In part, dithering is part of our animal nature, an instinctive paralysis when we are not sure what to do. Like the deer caught in the headlights of an approaching automobile, there is a tendency to freeze or do nothing at all, until a suitable course of action is clear or it is too late. Sometimes it is exactly the right thing to do. Other times, dithering is disastrous.

### Example One

Strapped with poor cash flow, the management at one firm cut all "unnecessary" expenses without thinking too much about the consequences of their actions. This came after a series of downsizings. Among the things that were eliminated: advertising, marketing, travel and consultants. While hunkering down can be a good short-term survival strategy in a genuine emergency, taken too far, it can threaten the viability of the business.

Besides being seriously overworked, their employees have been asked to do jobs that are not only outside their area of expertise, they are well outside their area of competence. As a result, work

moves very slowly, many mistakes are made and time is wasted trying to correct the mistakes.

Even though just a few hours of outside help could save many days of work, the company clings to the no "unnecessary" expenses doctrine, waiting for their cash flow to improve. To save a few dollars on one line of their balance sheet, this company is wasting many hours of employee time, jeopardizing the company's future and making their bottom line worse, instead of better.

### Example Two

Unsure if they wanted to start a company web site, management disregarded our advice to secure their domain name as quickly as possible. Because the company name was unusual, we cautioned them on the importance of controlling it. The cost of registration was minimal. It would have implied no commitment to develop a site. This suggestion was merely a strategy for keeping all their options open.

Hesitation, in this case, proved very expensive. A disgruntled customer purchased the domain name and published a single uncomplimentary web page. It became a very embarrassing situation.

While the rogue web site was eventually removed and the domain name was returned to the rightful owner, many hours and legal fees were spent undoing the damage created by this single failure to act, costing far more than registering the domain.

Can dithering be found in your company? One test is to ask your employees how long it typically takes to respond to a non-routine question from a customer. You may be unpleasantly surprised by their answer.

Could a consultant help your business stop dithering? Probably yes; with a fresh and impartial perspective, we can review your problem, suggest appropriate action and end the paralysis. Please contact us to discuss your particular circumstances.