

CHAPTER 24:

THE PATH OF LEAST RESISTANCE

“What we think or what we know or what we believe is, in the end, of little consequence. The only consequence is what we do.” – John Ruskin.

One of my clients had a wayward employee, and it was causing significant problems in his business. Whether consciously or not, he was a saboteur; he affected the whole mood in the company and undermined every attempt to move forward.

There were frequent flashpoints and discussions. These often resulted in agreements to change behaviours, yet it always went back to how it was before a few weeks later.

In the end, I suggested that my client get some advice from a legal HR expert so he could at least understand his options.

A few weeks later, after another altercation, he did just that.

The very pragmatic lawyer said, “You’ve three options from here.

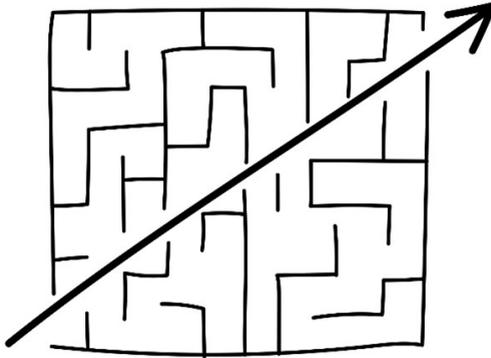
Option one is to go back into the office right now, tell him he’s sacked and to get the hell out. But, unfortunately, you’ll end up reaching a settlement outside of a tribunal.

Option two is you could take him through a disciplinary process that will most likely end up in tribunal, and you’ll probably settle outside.

Or you could invite him for an open and honest conversation about the fact that it is clearly not working for him or the company. Then ask him what he would want to terminate his employment.”

He took the third of the options, and they reached a compromise that saw the employee leave there and then (for a lot less time and money than a tribunal would have cost).

It was the best thing he could have done. It was like a new business from that point forward, and he was able to get on with his bigger plan.



With clarity of ‘where we want to be’ AND our starting position, we can formulate a sequence of steps to get us started, the path of least resistance between the current and desired state.

This route quickly and efficiently gives us the best shot at getting where we want to get.⁴⁰

It is a sequence of actions that can include idea creation, conversations, decisions and tasks.

Each of these steps has a:

- desired outcome and a set of inputs (things we have available right now).
- start and endpoint.
- best way of being done.
- person or persons best placed to plan and/or execute it.

40 It is not necessarily the easiest or the most comfortable.

If each step lacks this level of clarity, chances are it will end up being half-arsed, delayed or deferred. This slows progress and reduces the chance of getting to the outcome.

The path of least resistance balances the speed of progress, the level of acceptable risk and the scale of the potential opportunity.

Routine, repeatable sequences can be coded as processes, checklists or a route-map. These provide a 'business as usual framework' that can be applied, creating consistency avoiding the need for repeat mistakes.

When the path of least resistance (or the outcome) is entirely new, we have to figure out and organise the sequence into a plan or a project.

We can learn from others who have undertaken similar journeys or have found approaches that worked for them, but we need to be cautious. This is because the context, perspectives and attitudes of the people involved are always unique.

When starting from nowhere, we can engage our creativity by researching and brainstorming thoughts and ideas, turning them into a strawman⁴¹ model. Of course, the more people (with relevant skills, knowledge and experience) involved, the better the plan.

Any action sequence extending into the future has an **event horizon**, a point beyond which we can't predict what we need to do next. Therefore, detailed planning or design beyond this point can be a waste of time and energy.

As we execute any plan, we gather new information that extends the event horizon, allowing further steps to be planned.

41 A strawman is a plan that we are not emotionally attached to, such that we would be happy to burn it if a better one came along.

“I love deadlines; I like the whooshing sound they make as they fly by.” – Douglas Adams

Measuring progress against a planned timeline can be helpful, but there may also be other criteria (**threshold conditions**) that need to be met at each stage of the journey.

Perhaps a certain degree of success, resource availability (money, people, tools and materials) or a new skill or capability is required to continue moving forward. The threshold condition must be met before we can proceed.

We also have to deal with the ever-present ‘**do nothing**’ option.

We easily default to do-nothing and become **STUCK** when we are:

- **Unclear** and don’t know what we REALLY want.
- **Confused** and can’t see the path of least resistance.
- **Frightened** and not willing or able to take the next logical step in the sequence.
- **Procrastinating** and not taking the actions we know we should.
- **Feeding our inner Unicorn** and waiting for the universe to do all the hard work.

The trouble with the ‘do-nothing’ option is that the rest of the world doesn’t stop advancing just because we choose to stop. So we end up going backwards.

Sometimes we can move faster than we thought, and sometimes, we are slowed down by obstacles. This may often not be apparent to us until we are taking action

Either way, there is no time to waste, ever.