

Are you a Red Kite decision-maker?

Last week I was fortunate enough to spend a few days in the Swiss Alps. One beautifully sunny and clear afternoon I sat outside a mountain chalet amid the distant sound of cowbells and watched a Red Kite soar and circle above some meadows. After 5 minutes or so the bird swooped down to catch some prey, before flying off into the trees to eat its lunch.

The critical point for the Red Kite is deciding when to swoop and when to continue soaring. She is constantly looking out for prey and, once she has identified her potential victim, she must calculate her chances of a successful attack. Only then will she act.

As a business manager, you too must be continuously sensing changes in your environment and deciding when and when not to act. The fundamental question in this process is whether, like the Red Kite, you trust your judgement and are willing to act in line with it.

I have identified three types of decision-maker:

1. The Driver. This leader says 'yes' to virtually every new opportunity that comes along. He has boundless energy but can tire out his team and, when the big opportunity finally arrives, the organisation can be too stretched to exploit it.
2. The Analyst. This manager wants absolute certainty before taking action and exasperates his team with the constant need for further information and the development and evaluation of more and more options.
3. The Red Kite. The Red Kite decision-maker understands that nothing is certain in today's complex world and that she cannot consume precious resources chasing every opportunity. Equally, however, she also knows that when there is a big opportunity that her organisation is capable of exploiting she must act. Self-confidence and the honest ability to trust your judgement are the hallmarks of this manager.

Perhaps the quintessential Red Kite leader is Steve Jobs. When he returned to Apple in the late 1990's he closed down several high-profile development projects and stated that his strategy was simply to 'wait for the next big thing.'

As he continued to check progress in his own business against emerging developments in adjacent markets, he ultimately identified the potential of iTunes and the iPod. Apple has exploited the momentum gained to drive further developments, such as the iPhone, as well as growing its Mac business.

'Waiting for the next big thing' is the essence of the Red Kite leader, but so too is acting decisively once you have identified it. Being a Red Kite requires judgement, confidence in that judgement and a willingness to take prudent risk. Are you a Red Kite decision-maker?