

Hello, this is Wayne Rivers at The Family Business Institute. As always, thanks for tuning in. Scroll down below, please, and check out our social media icons and follow us, if you will, on Twitter and YouTube, and subscribe to our podcast and all that stuff. We appreciate your help.

This week I want to talk about why you don't have to be "The Answer." Allen Iverson, a former NBA player, his nickname was "The Answer". He had the answer for every defense, and I think that sometimes our family business leaders think that they too are the answer. This is consistent with the blog we did a few weeks ago about the Wisdom of Crowds, where basically two heads are better than one.

So, I remember a client from Houston called up one day, and it was 7:30 here, so it was 6:30 in Houston, and he said, "Wayne, its 6:30 in the morning. I just got here, and already there are five people standing at my door needing answers from me." and he was frustrated. He was frustrated because he didn't think that the people in his organization were even trying to get to the solutions that they needed. They would just come to him, he would give them the answer and shortcut the process. And sometimes we do cultivate that culture in our organizations because it feels good to be the answer person, doesn't it? It feels like you're the knight in shining armor that rides up on a steed and solves problems for everyone else and makes their lives better. Okay, that feels good psychologically. It's really nice, but it is also limiting. If you're creating that crutch in your culture, it's also quite limiting, and it forces you to have to work much harder than potentially you would otherwise.

Now, you do have to be a resource for your people. I'm not saying that you don't, but leadership is different from providing answers on a day to day basis. You've got to avoid conditioning your people not to think. You've got to challenge them to think, and you've got to try to drive down answers farther and farther down into the organization so that decisions are getting made in the field or at some point in the office where they don't have to rise up to you. There are just not that many situations that require the president or the CEO or the senior VP of something in an organization to make the decision. If you've got competent people, decisions can get made lower and lower in your organization.

I'm going to give you one question, one question that you can use to help drive down those decisions to a lower level in the organization and free up your time and energy, and also condition your company, condition your people to subscribe to the culture that decisions ought to get made at the appropriate level of the organization, and here's the question. What do you think we should do? It's as simple as that. You can use that with your children. You can use it with your employees. You can use it for people at church or on the committees that you're on or whatever. What do you think we should do?

And listen to the answers, and most of the time people will have things pretty well figured out. You might give them a suggestion here or there, maybe a tip. Every once in a while they'll be going off on a weird tangent and you'll need to center them back a little bit. That's okay too. But 95 times out of 100, let's say, they already know what needs to get done. They're just looking for ratification, maybe they want time with the boss, who knows what it is, but in order for you to free up your time and your energy and your life to do the things that you as

the leaders uniquely need to do in your businesses, you've got to drive down decision making, and what would you do is the question that will allow you to do that.

So, I've got a great story that talks about why the leaders don't need to make decisions. Let's put it that way. So everybody knows Dwight Eisenhower, World War II, and eventually president and all that stuff. Well after World War II, before he became president of the United States, he became the president of the University of Kansas. After World War II, they were doing a lot of building and putting up new classrooms and dormitories and administrative buildings and all this other stuff, and they were having this robust debate among the admin and the professors and everybody about where to pour the sidewalks. Where do they need sidewalks for all the pedestrian traffic? So they ended up ... They can't agree on anything, so they end up coming to Ike and they say, "Ike, we got to make some decisions. Where do we put these sidewalks?" And he said, "That's easy. Don't put any sidewalks down. Watch where pedestrians wear out the grass and then you'll know exactly where the sidewalks need to go."

I thought that was beautiful. He didn't provide the answer. He didn't allow the culture to bubble up decisions to the president of the university. He said, "Here's another way to do it that'll make life easy for all of us." He wasn't the answer, and I suggest to you, you don't have to be the answer either. Ask people, what would you do? Find alternative ways, like watching the pedestrians, where they wear down on the grass. Sometimes the answers will be quite apparent with virtually no time and effort on your part. This is Wayne Rivers at The Family Business Institute. We'd love to have your comments. Thank you.