

Fire yourself ... you'll be so glad you did!

 By [Annelize van Rensburg](#)

7 Oct 2015

Talent shortages on the outside and comfort zones on the inside create a growing dilemma for executive achievers. How long is too long in their current positions?

If they're competent, there will be little pressure from the board to move on as replacement challenges can be daunting, while after several years in a top job there's a big temptation to stay put, enjoy the position and give it one more year, or two ... or more.

But inertia has a cost attached.

The executive may have the potential to take on an even bigger job - outside or inside the organisation - and may lose the chance to grow new skills, move into a more prominent industry role and miss the opportunity for significantly enhanced earning power.

The business also pays a price. A complacent incumbent may miss the chance to innovate while the potential for reinventing an entire business or division may go unrecognised. Ultimately, competitiveness is compromised and the business is in danger of a slow death.

Meanwhile, new talent coming through the ranks sees little chance of promotion and will up and leave, disabling one of the most cost-efficient channels for talent acquisition - internal appointments.

When and if to go is therefore a strategic decision for the individual, the business and board.

'Do-I-go-or-stay?'

Retirement and succession planning get appropriate consideration from directors and senior executives. But the 'do-I-go-or-stay?' dilemma affects all age groups. You can be jaded at 35 or dynamic at 55.

Feedback from high achievers indicates the question has growing relevance and the onus is on individuals to come up with answers.

Some boards are relatively static and are disinclined to lead a shake-up involving top talent. They can often justify a 'steady-as-she-goes' approach as trading conditions are tough and the big need is to stay on course without undue risk.

So the likelihood is that the timing will be left to the individual. Inner fire should set the pace. Expire, retire or inspire.

What factors have to be considered?

Feedback from senior executives suggests five-plus-five arithmetic often applies. The top performer allows five years to redefine strategies, lead changes, build buy-in and deliver results. The next five years are spent maximising the gains that are starting to accrue, consolidating, renewing the team and bringing in a likely successor.

Feedback confirms this pattern; first a dynamic approach focused on 'big hairy' gains followed by consolidation; followed by reflection as new challenges dry up. Feedback also suggests the five-plus-five time-frame is being squeezed as techno and industry changes are speeding up. How does the executive move forward after private self-assessment?

If renewal, personal growth and the excitement of new challenges are priorities, there's only one way to go ...Fire yourself!!

Give yourself the boot

This does not always mean resigning. Sometimes you fire yourself up through personal re-invention or through shaking up structures and redefining the job and the role.

However, moving on - through an exit or the implementation of change - ensures you stay upwardly mobile and on top of the job (current or new). Of course, clinging indefinitely to your comfort zone may also get you fired. But you won't be doing the firing ... the board will.

ABOUT ANNELIZE VAN RENSBURG

Annelize van Rensburg is a director at SigniumAfrica (previously Talent Africa), a South African-based executive search and talent management company servicing sub-Saharan Africa. She is also Leader of Signium's Global Consumer Goods and Services Practice.

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