



How can I kill useless reports?

"I spend half my time cranking out financial reports that I'm sure no one reads. However, my CFO is nervous about discontinuing any of these reports without a direct order from the CEO. How can I get rid of this garbage?"

Mike: Your CFO is afraid to kill a few obsolete reports? Good grief. What's going to happen if he has to make a real decision? The time you're spending on these reports is a waste of corporate resources, and it's the CFO's job to eliminate unnecessary costs. I can only imagine what other useless expenditures he's afraid to confront.

In the absence of leadership from your CFO, you probably have two options. One is the classic stealth approach: Simply stop generating (or distributing) a few of the most useless reports and see if anyone notices. Month by month, get rid of a few more. After a year or so, the problem will have solved itself.

A more aggressive approach is to circulate a signup list asking current recipients if they still want to see each of the reports you're distributing. Chances are, a lot of reports will get no requests at all. Your CFO can hardly ask you to create reports for which there's absolutely zero demand.

Does motivation matter?

"I run a small accounting department with five clerical employees who have been here forever. They do their jobs competently, but I can see they're not terribly interested in the business. Is there some way I can get them more engaged? Or does it even matter?"

Mike: Yes, enthusiasm matters, if only for the sake of your morale. Do you really want to spend a large part of every day in dullsville, surrounded by people who believe their work is pointless? I'll bet you don't, and I'll bet your employees don't, either.

You may not be able to get your clerical employees interested in the business itself, but you can certainly get them excited about being part of a team. Take the whole group bowling--I've done that several times, and it's wonderful to watch an introverted bookkeeper scream at getting a strike. Or go roller skating or go-cart racing or square dancing. And be sure to bring a camera and post pictures of the outing on the department bulletin board. You'll see a change in morale almost instantly.

Boardroom Behavior - Can I fire a disruptive director?

"I recruited a top lawyer as a board member recently, and it was a terrible mistake. He fights with everybody, his advice is useless, and he drank way too much at our holiday party. He's supposed to serve a three-year term, but is there any way I can get rid of him sooner?"

Mike: You can, but be careful. Start by finding out how your other directors feel about their lawyer colleague. If they agree that he's a trouble-maker, then have a private talk with him. Explain that you don't think the chemistry is working out and suggest that he resign his board seat. If he refuses--and he might, if he's prone to "fight with everybody"--then you'll have to go back to the board and ask them to fire him. (That's why it's important to get buy-in from your other board members before you take any action.)

However, be sure you listen carefully to what the rest of the board says. They may tell you that he's a little rough around the edges--that's not unusual with litigators--but still makes a valuable contribution. Perhaps he's a valuable source of referrals, or he understands intellectual property issues better than anyone else. And they may even tell you that he challenges your perspective on the business, which they feel is necessary. He probably didn't become a "top lawyer" by being a jerk.

Mike is a financial guru. He has 44 years experience as a director, advisor, financial consultant, CFO and auditor, and has helped companies deal with issues involving corporate oversight, financial management, financial reporting, forecasting and financing. His financial tools have been adopted by hundreds of companies, and he speaks frequently on finance and entrepreneurship. to read some of his comments.



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