

Decision Making

Introduction

Decision making is key in every part of a person's life, but it becomes especially important as an individual moves into progressively greater leadership roles. As a leader, you have to use every resource you can to make the best decisions you can make. Many leaders find that tools can be helpful in making their decisions (along with their "gut" and some old-fashioned common sense). We'll talk about a few of them here.

Lesson Objectives

At the end of the lesson a learner should be able to:

1. Discuss ways to make decisions
2. Discuss how to decide which methods would be best depending on the decision to be made

The Seven-Step Ethical Formula for Decision Making

The Josephson Institute of Ethics discusses a seven-step way for making better decisions.

1. Stop and Think

Have you ever tried to make a decision while you were in a hurry or trying to do too many things at once? One of the most important things to remember when you are making decisions is to stop whatever is going on, or at least stop whatever you are doing. This will help to settle your thoughts and calm yourself down. Then, once you are calm, you can think about the future and how your decision will affect you later.

2. Clarify Your Goals

Do you know where you are going with the decision you are trying to make? Knowing what your goals are will help you put things into perspective. It will also help you to put your decisions in order, if some things need to happen before others. For more information on goal setting, take a look at the goal setting lessons!

3. Determine Facts

Think about trying to do a workshop or making a speech without knowing anything about the topic you have been given. It would be very difficult!! This is just like trying to make a decision without having all of the facts you need. Be sure that you have all the facts about a situation before you make decisions. To figure out what you need to know, first figure out what you already know and then what you need to learn. Be ready to do what you need to do to find the facts that you need.

4. Develop Some Options

Now that you know where you're going and what you want to accomplish, make a list of all of your options. You may want to talk to people you trust to help you think about all of your options. Brainstorm options as if time, money, and effort were no object. The more options you have, the easier it will be for you to develop a solid plan.

5. Consider the Consequences

You need to consider not only all of your options, but also the consequences of your options and of the decision itself. Two ways to do that are:

- a. Weigh your options by thinking about the six pillars of character discussed in the character and ethics section. Will the options or the decision you're making, violate any of the Six Pillars? If so, cross those off of your list.
- b. Identify people that will be affected by the options or the decisions and how they will be affected. Will your decision help or hurt these individuals?

6. Choose

Make your decision. If you are still unsure about what to do after going through all of these steps, think about using one of these methods:

- a. Talk to people that you trust. Talking through decisions can be very helpful because you can hear someone else's thoughts about the given situation. Maybe they will think of something that you missed or help you think of new things.
- b. What would the most ethical person you know do? Ask yourself that question, and then try to behave the way that they would.
- c. What would you do if you were sure that everyone you know would find out? If your decision made the front page of your hometown newspaper, or someone would call your grandma and tell her what you did, would you be proud of the decision you made?
- d. If you were on the outside the decision and would be affected by it, but not the decision maker, how would you want someone else to act?

7. Monitor and Modify

Make sure that if the decision you made was the wrong one, you are able to go back and change it.

Other Techniques for Decision Making

What are some other methods for decision making? Mind Tools (www.mindtools.com) offers some different techniques to tackle your decision-making problems. Some of those techniques include:

❖ **Prioritizing your decisions**

1. Make a list of all of the decisions that you need to make.
2. Score each of the items you have written down on a scale of 1-5, one being the least likely to help you reach your goal and five being the most likely. For example, if you are trying to recruit new 4-H members to your club, score the decisions based on how they would contribute to that goal.
3. The decisions that you make first will be the ones that score the highest.

❖ **Evaluating which option is more important**

1. List all of the options you have for a decision.
2. Select a pair of options (start with the first and second on the list), and compare them. Keep whichever one is more important to you.
3. Compare the option that you chose with the next on the list.
4. Continue comparing items until you are left with only one.

❖ **Choosing between options by thinking about possible outcomes**

1. Draw a small square on the left side of a piece of paper. This represents the decision you need to make.
2. Draw lines representing each option leaving the square, and write the option on the line.
3. At the end of each line, think about the outcome of that solution. If the outcome is uncertain, draw a small circle. If the outcome is another decision, draw another box. If the decision has no more outcomes, leave it blank.
4. If you have boxes, continue to draw lines and more boxes or circles. Continue this process until you have drawn out as many of the possible outcomes and decisions as you can possibly see.
5. Review the tree and select your path accordingly.

❖ **Looking at the pros and cons for each possible decision**

1. Draw up a table with three columns.
2. In the first column write "pros," in the second "cons," and in the third "implications."
3. In the pro column list all of the positive elements of the decision.
4. In the con column list all of the negative or challenging elements of the decision.
5. In the implications column list all of the possible consequences of the decision.
6. If the decision is not readily apparent based on this first round of pros, cons and implications, either brainstorm another round or give each pro and con a score from 1 (weak) to 5 (strong) and add up the score.

❖ **Analyzing the influences for and against making a decision**

1. List all the influences for making a decision in one column and all the influences against making the decision in another column.
2. Assign a score for each of the things that you list (1 for a weak reason to 5 for a strong reason).
3. Draw a diagram showing the strengths and weaknesses for and against making your decisions.

❖ **Assessing the decision from all points of view**

1. Look at the decision from all objective points of view.
 - a. Focus on the data available. Look at all the information you have and see what you can learn from it. Discover what you don't know and either try to find that knowledge or account for why you lack the information.
 - b. Focus on your gut reaction or your intuition. Think of how other people might react emotionally. Try to understand your response as well as the emotional responses of others.
 - c. Focus on the bad points of the decision. Look at the decision with caution and from a defensive point of view. Think of how it might not work. Thinking in this manner will make any decision you choose stronger because you identify the weak points in advance.

- d. Focus on all of the positives of the decision. Think about all of the benefits and values of the decision. This will help you stay focused if and when the decision or circumstance becomes difficult.
- e. Focus on creativity. Develop creative solutions for situations that arise.
- f. Focus on the process control. Think like the CEO of a company and look at the decision from that point of view. Be directive when you need to think a certain way or focus on another attribute of the process.

❖ **Deciding if a decision is worth making**

1. Before making any decision, you should consider whether the decision is important enough to make. If the decision will not be beneficial, advance a cause, or contribute something positive, consider that it might not be worth making.

Reflection:

- ❖ Think about a decision you know you will be faced with in the future. Go through the steps listed above to try and help you make the decision. Are some steps more challenging than others? If so, which are more challenging?
- ❖ How can we make sure that our decision-making process is always a positive experience?
- ❖ What about using this process with a team? Would it be as effective? Would the steps you found challenging be as challenging if a team working on it, or would other steps be more challenging in that case?

Resources

Josephson Institute of Ethics. (2005). Retrieved from <http://www.josephsoninstitute.org/> on January 27, 2005.

Mind Tools. (1995-2005). *Essential skills for an excellent career*. Retrieved from <http://www.mindtools.com> on October 5, 2003.