

Why Don't You Make Up Your Mind?

Fine tuning techniques for your decision-making process

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Few skills are more important for managers than the ability to make good decisions. Unfortunately, many people simply don't like to *have to* make up their minds. They don't want to say yea or nay. The reason is simple. It is because the decisions we make involve some risk. We are at risk because we know that our decisions reflect on us as an individual and in many instances, on our ability as a leader. Few of us relish the prospect of having to prove our worth over and over again, but that is exactly what happens with the decision-making process.

Deciding how you decide

If you're someone who worries, either a little or a lot, about making a bad decision, the first step in reducing your anxiety is to have a clear understanding of your own decision-making style.

Dorothy Leeds, author of *Smart Questions: A New Strategy for Successful Managers*, places all the world's decision makers into four categories:

"Commanders," who are by nature impatient and whose eagerness leads them into quick decisions;

"Convincers," the persuader/promoter type, who tend to act solely on emotion, deciding quickly that something should be done because it "feels right;"

"Caregivers," who also make decisions on the basis of their feelings but are just as concerned with the feelings of others. Since they don't want to hurt anyone, they often take too long to decide; and

"Calculators," perfectionists who want every possible piece of information before making a decision. The problem, of course, is that you can never get all the information you need to make the "perfect" decision.

Once you identify which of the four styles is most like you, find someone whom you feel has a different style than your own in order to establish some balance.

For example, if you are a *Commander*, force yourself to slow down long enough to bring your proposed decision to a *Caregiver*, someone who will consider all the sides. If you are a *Caregiver*, try to set a time limit on how long you will give yourself to make the decision. Then find a *Commander* type to assess your judgment. In other words, don't go it alone. Find at least one other person who isn't just like you – and who won't arbitrarily agree with you – to help you through any blind spots you may have in your decision-making process.

Keep in mind that when it comes to decisions, nobody bats a thousand. The best you can hope to do is to make more good decisions than bad ones.

Maintaining Your Objectivity

To make better decisions, you also have to understand how your own biases may tamper with your logic. To help you maintain your objectivity, consider the following points:

Realize that you may be experiencing stress.

Experts say that in times of stress, you are likely to have a bias toward the first idea you hear about, without carefully exploring others. For example, if you are under pressure to make a fast decision about purchasing some new software, you may shortcut your usual process of evaluating all the pros and cons of a particular product in order to meet a purchase deadline. Instead of being thorough, you'll overlook or minimize possible problems – and potentially wind up making a decision you regret.

Beware of emotional factors that could unduly influence your decisions. Having an emotional "sense" about a decision you must make is not an indication that you will use poor judgment, but it should be a signal to use caution. Say, for example, that you are considering two candidates for a vacancy you're finally being allowed to fill on your team. The prospect of working with Candidate A is exciting while you are only mildly interested in Candidate B. First, examine what it is about Candidate A that generates your enthusiasm. Then stop and consider which of Candidate B's finer points you may be overlooking because of your lack of interest. Certainly, your emotions may be telling you something you should listen to; but they may also be leading you away from the logical choice.

Don't make decisions based on assumptions about the "obvious." Many first-time supervisors and managers often make this type of easy mistake. For example, they "assume" that the only way to motivate their employees is to use a "one size fits all" approach to recognition. They organize an office picnic and provide the hot dogs reasoning that everyone is sure to have a great time. Obviously, when any decision is based on an automatic assumption, they tend to be poor ones. Always check for the reasoning behind your choices.

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