



## Why Don't You Make Up Your Mind?

Fine tuning techniques for your decision-making process

**Don't lose sight of the "big picture."** When we think about a decision that needs to be made, we often have a tendency to be one-dimensional, thinking only in terms of serving a single goal. We can momentarily forget about other goals which we, or others have set in place and sabotage them without realizing it.

Perhaps you have an employee who expresses boredom with his or her job. You decide to send the employee to an assignment in another unit doing duties that are different, but still within the employee's same job classification. Unfortunately, the new assignment takes the employee away from their area of interest and into an entirely unrelated area that offers them little or no satisfaction.

Your decision to provide the employee with different duties may have solved the immediate problem of boredom, but how did your decision contribute to the employee's long-range career plan? Was your decision worth the potential loss of a good employee who is now even more dissatisfied with their job?

Always be mindful of making a decision that will solve an immediate problem at the expense of a larger one.

### Testing your decisions

A large part of what causes people to make poor decisions is a lack of confidence in themselves and their decision-making ability.

Unfortunately, this is a condition that may worsen, not improve over time. So, if you happen to be someone who needs to "test the water" before jumping all the way in, consider these suggestions to make sure you're comfortable with the decision you've made.

#### Find a "devil's advocate."

Present a friend or co-worker with the facts and say, "Here's the problem. Here's what I want to do.

Do you see anything wrong with my decision? Do you see any flaws in my thinking?"

**Pretend you're an outsider.** Try to consciously look at the situation you're facing from an outsider's point-of-view. To accomplish this, pretend you're giving advice to someone else who is making the decision instead of you.

**Investigate your information.** To minimize the risk in your decision, try to make sure the information you're basing it on is good information. By now, your experience should probably tell you what sources are trustworthy and whose judgment and advice has been the most consistent. In the end, however, it's still your decision. So, make sure that whatever information you have makes sense to you and don't always take for granted that every piece of information you receive is accurate. As much as you can, check things out for yourself.

**Ask yourself, "How comfortable am I explaining my decision to someone else?"** Before you "spring" your decision on your public, give it the "acid test" with a sympathetic listener. If, as you are trying to explain your decision to this person, your stomach feels "funny" and you need a "tums," you're probably less sure of your decision than you think. If this happens, take it as a sign that you need to do whatever it takes to get comfortable with the decision you've made, even if it means re-thinking the decision.

In the end, regardless of how much effort you put into the decision making process, you may still have a small sense of hesitation. Realize that this is a natural part of the process – and what is important now is being able to move on to other things with the firm belief that you made the best decision you could.

[Click here](#) to return to the Front Page



### When You Have to Decide Now: The 5-Minute Technique

Ben Franklin, statesman, inventor and friend of thunderstorms, had a strategy for making quick decisions. He would list the reasons for taking an action on one side of a sheet of paper and the reasons for not taking the action on the other side. Then he did whatever had more listed reasons.

If circumstances compel you to make a quick decision, consider applying Ben's technique – with a slight twist.

**Make the lists, but assign a priority to each reason.** Don't assume pros and cons hold equal status; assign a numerical weight to each reason before deciding.

**Think about how the problem is presented to you.** Without much time to decide, you can easily fall into the trap of having your judgment swayed by the way a problem may be presented. So think of another way of describing the situation to yourself. If the situation your facing is presented as a loss in productivity, try thinking instead in terms of how things can still get done.

**Buy yourself some time.** You hear this strategy on the news quite often when the press is asking someone for his or her response to the controversy of the day. Instead of saying nothing, they opt to buy themselves some time by explaining that the matter is under assessment. This same technique can work for you too – provided you indicate a time when you *will* have your decision.

**Err on the side of caution.** If you truly have only five minutes in which to make your decision, realize that it obviously doesn't allow you any time to gather, much less evaluate the information you need to make a proper decision. Without all the facts, you may be wise to err on the conservative side.

### Better Decisions Are On the Rise!

Having trouble making a decision? Try standing up. Researchers at the University of Southern California's Laboratory of Attention and Motor Performance determined that people think better on their feet.

It seems as though the act of standing upright causes a heart rate increase of about ten beats per minute and an increase in neural stimulation resulting in improved cognitive functions.

By standing, a person can increase his or her information-processing speed by as much as 20 percent for tasks involving rapid decision making. These findings would seem to suggest that standing up for a stretch break every now and then can help pave the way for speedier decisions...but you probably knew that already.