

# 7 Steps for Making More Effective Decisions

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As a leader you make many decisions every day. Some may seem effortless and come easily, while you may agonize over others and second guess yourself repeatedly. You probably know people who seemingly make difficult, complex decisions with ease and others who can't decide which movie to see or what to order from a simple menu.

Becoming a more effective decision-maker will improve your leadership ability and increase your self-confidence. In addition, it is a skill that can help you make better use of your time, reduce your stress and help you achieve your goals. Not unlike other skills, decision-making can be improved and produce better, higher quality outcomes, especially for those critical, complicated dilemmas you wrestle with.

## 7 steps to help you make more effective decisions

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1. **Know yourself.** Focus on your inborn personality traits and consider their impact on your decision-making. For example, one of the most important of these traits is your tolerance and ability to deal with risk. Your risk-taking profile has a profound affect on the options that you seek and value. When you are more aware of your inborn style, you can challenge yourself to consider a wider variety of options.

Are you a procrastinator? Is your natural style to get right to it, or are you a Scarlet O'Hara who would rather "worry about it tomorrow?" Like risk-taking, your propensity for procrastination can serve you well or ill in making decisions. Some decisions might need more time. With others, if you don't act quickly, you may miss an opportunity. As Williams James once said, "When you have a choice to make, and you don't make it, that itself is a choice."

When making decisions, do you trust your gut, or do you carefully ponder and consider? Again, both of these approaches can be useful and helpful. Trusting yourself is important, and knowing when a decision will benefit from careful consideration helps you make more effective decisions with positive long and short-term consequences.

2. **Clearly identify the "right" problem or issue.** Do you sometimes focus on the "squeaky wheel," what really seems most obvious, pushes your buttons and demands immediate attention? Take time to check in on your feelings and values to make certain that you have identified the "right" problem or issue before making a decision.
3. **Identify your goals and interests.** In the absence of goals, decisions can appear to be scattered and haphazard. The key here is to have well defined goals so that the pros and cons of the various alternatives you are considering can be well thought through. You can then ask yourself, "Does this decision fit with my overall plan, goals and priorities? What is the best possible outcome?"
4. **Frame the decision clearly and gather your facts.** Look at the issue in its broadest context, and take time to describe the decision as clearly and objectively as possible. Gather your facts and data, and make sure that your sources are reliable and your facts accurate.
5. **Check to make sure that you have considered a wide array of options and their consequences.** Play a lot of "what if." Take a step back and try to develop a broad array of options. Take time to consider some of the most likely consequences of various choices. Check with trusted sources to see if you are accurate in your assessments and whether you missed any important possible outcomes.

6. **Consider the barriers to effective decision-making.** Do you ever find yourself holding unrealistic assumptions? Overcome this natural inclination by carefully checking your facts and data and, again, use others as a sounding board. Do you rely too much on past experience, or on the flip side do you sometimes wonder why you failed to learn from the past? Do you have difficulty identifying when enough information is enough? Being aware of these barriers can improve your ability to make sound decisions.

Moreover, "Satisficing," settling too quickly, is a significant problem, especially for women who often fear that being too hard-nosed or holding out for their interests will jeopardize their relationships. Women also worry that if they don't agree they will be seen in an unfavorable light.

7. **Check in on the results.** So, how effective was your decision-making process? Are you pleased with the outcome? Did it advance your interests and goals? Are you comfortable with the outcome? Does it fit with your beliefs and values? Ask yourself these questions, and if you're not completely comfortable with the outcome, don't treat it as a failure. Instead, learn from it, and use the experience to make better decisions in the future.

Try this 7-step decision-making process the next time you are faced with a difficult decision, mindfully focusing on the impact of your personal style, and paying attention to the common barriers to effective decision-making. By purposefully following this process over time, you'll become more adept and make more high quality decisions. You'll find that if you consistently follow these 7 steps, you'll improve your leadership ability, reduce the stress in your life, spend your time more productively and will be more likely to achieve your goals.

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Linkage is a global organizational development company that specializes in leadership development. We provide clients around the globe with integrated solutions that include strategic consulting services, customized leadership development and training experiences, tailored assessment services, and benchmark research. Linkage's mission is to connect high-performing leaders and organizations to the futures they want to create.

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