

Become a better decision-maker

Decision-making is an inescapable task for managers. In the eyes of employees, it is the managers who must take the final responsibility for small and large decisions. The quality of those decisions determines the success of a manager's efforts. If you want to become a quality decision-maker, particularly when the "big" decisions count, the following guidelines will assist:

1. Adopt a systematic approach

Decision-making is actually part of problem solving – there would be no decision to make if there were no problems to solve. Decision-making is the component of the problem-solving process that follows analysis of the problem and is followed, in turn, by action to implement the decision. A thorough problem-solving process is useful in arriving at major decisions.

2. Focus on important decisions

Try not to spend too much time on small matters. It's the important decisions that must receive your full attention. Deciding who should fill the hot water urn each morning is of less importance than a decision about the focus of the new marketing strategy. Importance is determined by asking such questions as:

- How close is the deadline?
- What are the consequences of a poor decision?
- Who is affected by the decision?
- Is the decision reversible?

Answers to these questions will also help clarify the decision to be made.

3. Avoid making snap decisions

Spur-of-the-moment decisions are often merely guesses. Impulsive decisions relating to major issues could later lead to a serious number of, or magnitude of, consequential problems.

4. Don't become a victim of analysis paralysis

It is also important to consider the limitations of time and resources that don't allow for a thorough analysis of all issues every time you need to make a decision. By putting off a decision, you will only add to an already overflowing agenda of unfinished business.



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5. Base your decisions on facts

A decision is no better than the data on which it is based. Have all the facts at your disposal. Improve your exploration of options by asking questions such as:

- What facts do I have?
- What else do I need to know?
- What information is available?
- Whom should I ask?
- What should I ask?

6. Don't be afraid of making the wrong decision

There is a risk involved in every decision. Consider the worst thing that can happen if you make the wrong choice - rarely is a disaster the consequence. A readiness to risk failure is a quality that characterises all good decision-makers.

7. Learn from your mistakes

If your decision is later shown to be the wrong one, find out where you went wrong. Seek advice from others. Did you neglect or under-emphasise any of the steps in the problem-solving process?

8. Use your imagination

A logical decision is not always the best answer in all situations. Be prepared to use brainstorming techniques, analogies and lateral thinking in your search for a new approach to the problem at hand. Use the technique that best fits the problem.

9. Resist making decisions under stress

When you have to make a decision under crisis conditions, stand back from the problem and consider the situation. For example, you may not have to make an immediate decision. Use all the time available to ensure the best response is achieved. Avoid impulse decisions – decisions made under stress can be faulty.

10. Make your decisions, then move on

Once a decision is made and implemented to address a problem, move on to other pressing and important needs.

Further information

The following fact sheets provide further information on these issues:

- Help groups make decisions
- Problem solving