



The Anatomy of a Decision

We live in a world governed by decisions; some we make -- others that are made for us. We make thousands of decisions everyday. In many respects, decisions are the steps that make up our journey. Good decisions make for a somewhat easier stride. Bad decisions often leave us dragging through life.

There is a process that will better your chances of making good decisions.

I find that many bad decisions were made under the guise of not making a decision at all. There is a fear of decision making in our society. Driven out of fear of making the wrong decision, people settle in on indecisive behavior. These procrastinators of decisive action convince themselves that by doing nothing (not making a decision) they are better off. In reality, they made a decision to leave the circumstances of their life up to chance or the control of another person -- dangerous territory.

The process of decision making is quite simple if you learn a few linear steps that will aid your search for the best possible alternative. Whether it be a decision to sign a record deal, accept a particular engagement, hire personnel or a capital purchase, this linear approach will move you in the right direction.

Here are my 4 suggested steps for making a good decision:

Step 1 - Define the decision to be made

- Sounds obvious but many don't fully evaluate the elements of the decision to be made and the layers or subsets of the decision. For example, let's say you believe the decision is whether or not to sign a record deal. Sounds straight forward, but within that decision there are several subsets of decisions to be made that if not fully realized up front, could make for a bad decision. Other subset questions would be -- Who has voting rights on the decision? Is now the right time in the product life cycle of the band to make that decision? Will a decision now, preclude a better deal later? You get the idea. Each of these decisions must be addressed as part of the overall decision. If you take your time defining this step, the remaining steps will be more precise. Sadly, definition of the decision is typically given the least consideration.
- Additionally, as you define the decision to be made, you should consider whether or not it is really your decision to be made, whether the timing is appropriate, list all the people it will affect and identify the values of your organization or those personal to you that will be used to make the decision.

Step 2 - List the possible alternatives

- Step 2 should be the fun part of the process. This is where you dream. List all of the possible alternatives. Be sure to include the input of others as part of the creative process. Research the alternatives as to cost, success rates of others and fit. Play out each alternative to its logical end. If/then analysis will allow you to think through each alternative to see if you like what you see at the end.
- Test each alternative against your mission and purpose. Ask the hard questions at this point: Am I choosing this alternative because it is the popular decision? Will this decision cause me to compromise my beliefs or integrity? Am I following the crowd instead of my own personal plan? Pray about the list and seek spiritual confirmation of your final alternative.

Step 3 - Make the decision and implement action

- Surprisingly, many people stop at Step 2. After reviewing alternatives, they don't make a selection and move ahead. Fear of failure leaves them stalled. They fail to realize that we make a decision by not making a decision. Step 3 forces the issue and motivates us to move ahead with implementation. Simply accept there will be uncertainty and fear, but a decision has been made and you must move forward. You should have calculated jumping off points that allow you to redirect your actions early on in the implementation if you determine a bad decision has been made. Don't, however, use this as an excuse to bail out early on a good decision just because implementation is getting a little rocky.

Step 4 - Review and Learn

- I like to say there are winners and there are learners. Step 4 allows you to learn from your decision (and mistakes) so you become a better decision maker. Successful executives that make multi-million dollar decisions are often given too much credit for being smart. They simply have learned to evaluate the decisions at hand from the perspective of past decisions. Eventually, you will have a mental catalogue of life decisions from which you can compare present decisions -- we call that wisdom. The important thing to remember on Step 4 is that you must review and learn to improve in the future.

By following this linear decision process you will certainly improve your level of success regarding decisions that impact your calling. Having said that, there are some common mistakes that people make when coming to a decisive conclusion:

Common Mistakes

- **They follow the herd mentality.** As I coach musicians, communicators and organizations, I am continually amazed at the willingness of individuals to make a decision entirely because that's how others made the decision. Granted, we can learn from other's experiences, but that must be a part of analysis and not the entire reason for our decision. Sometimes, the desired goal, such as a record deal, partnership, nonprofit corporation, becomes so attractive that we fail to do our homework and allow the attraction of what others have defined as success, pull us into a mistake. In the retail world, Wal-Mart is often the dream account for any manufacturer of a product. They believe that if they can get their product on the shelves of Wal-Mart, their company will be very successful. However, business history has shown that many companies have gone out of business under the continual pressure to cut wholesale prices that Wal-Mart uses to improve its profitability. The manufacturer, in pursuit of what they thought was the pinnacle of retailing position is forced into layoffs, product compromise and unsafe efficiencies that are in contradiction to their corporate values. Indeed the grass isn't always greener. Beware, following the herd, might lead you over the cliff.
- **They over or under utilize the opinions of others.** Input is good, but don't allow someone to make the decision for you. Whether they admit it or not, everyone has an agenda. The reasons that someone would guide you to make a decision is not always apparent. That's fine as long as we realize the existence of agendas and we don't allow someone to make a decision for us.
- **They only See or hear what makes their favorite decision fit.** This is a tricky one because it usually takes place solely within your mind. It is a joke among statisticians that they can make the numbers fit any decision. Tell them what logical conclusion you want to reach, and they can manipulate the statistics to fit the occasion. Your mind has the same capacity. By selective recall of things said and seen, you can convince yourself that the decision you really want to make is correct. Your mind is very good, out of necessity, of routinely excluding information from consideration. It has to exclude millions of bits of data daily just so you don't go insane. But, we must be careful to realize that subconsciously, we will exclude relevant information just so we can select a choice that is most appealing. The choice might be the least confrontational, or highest in personal satisfaction or materialistic greed -- but it may not be the best decision. The best defense for avoiding this tendency to exclude information is to carefully follow the steps above and be honest with yourself regarding your reasons versus values.
- **Not trusting your intuition.** There really is something to the whole notion of making a gut decision. Gut decisions use intuition to narrow down the list of alternatives. It could be a feeling about a person, your level of trust or about the timing of a situation. It is the spiritual world attempting to override the physical world. We are 99% spiritual beings (actually we are even more spiritual than that since spirit is an element of the divine and God is infinite -- but that's another article). Yet, we don't rely on the spiritual decision making capacity that is at hand. Intuition is an assimilation of the spiritual as well as the subconscious (reading external body language of the record executive, subliminal messages that are compared to past and forgotten experiences). Intuition still has a place in the linear flow of decisive behavior. Most often, it is the red flag that should cause concern and further analysis. Some people are more in tune with their intuition. Research has proven that women are on average more intuitive than men. While you can develop your intuition, in the short term, the lesson learned here is to always include some female counsel in your decision making process if you are a man. It is particularly

important that women be exposed to the people involved in the equation to gain their perception of trustworthiness and values.

The important thing to remember is that good decisions just don't happen; they must be managed. By following these steps and cautions, you will be well on your way to improved decisions.

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