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Three Essentials for Making Effective Decisions

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Notes, References & Quotes

A Brief Guide for Making Decisions:¹

1. **Identify the Decision Maker:**
 - a. Who is in charge of the decision? If you are the decision maker, own the decision. If you are not the decision maker, don't attempt to claim it; it belongs to someone else.
2. **Clarify what is to be decided:**
 - a. Establish priority among issues to be addressed. Which can be left until later?
3. **Consider other stakeholders:**
 - a. Often there are others who will be impacted by, or have an interest in, the decision you make. When appropriate, solicit their counsel and input.
 - b. Do your best to help them feel understood. Chances are good that if you do this effectively they will support your decision even if it goes contrary to their interests.
4. **Gather and analyze data, facts, and information:**
 - a. Assemble the information you have; determine what else you wish you had. As time and expense allow, gather and analyze what you can.
Note: If you want to improve something, figure out a reliable way to measure it.
Caution:
 - don't stall the process with the excuse that you need yet more information.
 - don't allow data to drown the core issue; numbers and charts can distract & deceive.
5. **Consider options:**
 - a. Identify as many options as you can, push yourself to think creatively.
6. **Determine your objectives, then rank them:**
 - a. Relative to the decision you are facing, which objectives are most important?
7. **Identify the option that appears to best meet key objectives:**
 - a. Think: if I settle on this option what will likely happen, where will it lead?
 - b. Consider sharing your selected option with a friend, or with someone with a different perspective than yours, or with God. Articulate your selection and monitor the feedback you receive.
8. **Say yes to your selected option and mourn the loss of the others:**
 - a. You must let go of the option(s) you do not select; some of your desires may remain unsatisfied. Unless you accept the loss, and perhaps intentionally mourn it, you may not feel free to pursue your chosen option and fully enjoy the good that is in it.
9. **Implement your decision:**
 - a. Implementation often gets shortchanged in the decision-making process; plan it in advance. Who is going to carry the message? What is step one? Who is going to take each step, etc.?
 - b. Taking a first step will often move you further down the road, where you'll see/experience what was previously hidden. If it feels increasingly all wrong you may be able to return to step five, or bail out and cut your losses.
 - c. Note, there is often a lag or depression that accompanies a weighty decision (like buyer's remorse). Don't be too quick to abandon a carefully-selected decision because of early misgivings.

¹ The steps are Crookston's modification (with permission) of those presented by Dr. Roger B. Porter, IBM Professor of Business and Government, Harvard University, and presented in "Strategic Decision Making" a Program on Leadership for Senior Executives offered by the Center for Management Research, Wellesley, MA, March 29-30, 2005.

The Road Not Taken²
Robert Frost

TWO roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveller, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence;
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I –
I took the one less travelled by,
And that has made all the difference.

² Frost, Robert. (1924). The Road Not Taken. In: *Mountain Interval*. P.9. New York, NY: Henry Holt

3. Collins, J. (2005). *Level 5 leadership: the triumph of humility and fierce resolve*. *Harvard Business Review*. Jul/Aug - 83(7/8), 136-146.

Characteristics of a Level 5 Leader:

- “A compelling modesty” (p. 141)
 - “Channels ambition into the company, not self”... (p. 142)
 - “Looks in the mirror, not out the window, to apportion responsibility for poor results, never blaming other people, external factors, or bad luck.” (p. 142)
 - “Looks out the window, not in the mirror, to apportion credit for the success of the company – to other people, external factors, and good luck.” (p. 142)
 - In more than 2/3 of the comparison companies, a gargantuan ego contributed to the demise or continued mediocrity (p. 142)
4. Covey, Stephen R. (1989). *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People: Restoring the character ethic*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.
 - “We are responsible for our own lives.” (p. 71)
 - “Our behavior is a function of our decisions, not our conditions.” (p. 71)
 - “Look at the word *responsibility* – “response-ability” – the ability to choose your response.’ (p. 71)
 - “It is inspiring to realize that in choosing our response to circumstance, we powerfully affect our circumstance.” (p. 86)
 5. Gallagher, Winifred. (2009). *Rapt: Attention and the Focused Life*. New York, NY: The Penguin Press.
 - “Your life is the creation of what you focus on—and what you don’t.” (p. 4)
 - ““Nowadays you don’t hear people saying that they’re working on becoming a better person,” says Peterson, “but once upon a time, they did. Wouldn’t it be great if instead of just working out at the gym, we’d go off and focus on doing something that makes us better people?”” (p. 213)
 6. Gladwell, Malcolm. (2005). *Blink: the power of thinking without thinking*. New York, NY: Little, Brown and Company
 - There are moments, particularly in times of stress when haste does not make waste, when our snap judgments and first impressions can offer much better means of making sense of the world. The first task of *Blink* is to convince you of a simple fact: decisions made very quickly can be every bit as good as decisions made cautiously and deliberately. (p. 15)
 - We need to accept the mysterious nature of our snap judgments. We need to respect the fact that it is possible to know without knowing why we know and accept that - sometimes we’re better off that way. (p. 52)
 - “The way that people with autism see the world gives us a very good sense of what happens when our mind-reading faculties fail”... (p. 214)
 - “What if it were possible for autism – for mind blindness – to be a temporary condition instead of a chronic one? Could that explain why sometimes otherwise normal people come to conclusions that are completely and catastrophically wrong?” (p. 221)
 7. Gunther, Robert E. (2008). *The Truth About Making Smart Decisions*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: FT Press
 - “One good mistake can teach us more than all the successful decisions combined.” (p. 24)
 - “In making decisions, keep a spirit of humility. Seek out people who are smarter than you. This requires setting aside your ego and concentrating on making the best decisions possible.” (p. 120)
 8. Klein, Gary. (2003). *The Power of Intuition: How to use your gut feelings to make better decisions at work*. New York, NY: Currency Books; Doubleday.
 - “You were probably told to analyze a problem thoroughly, list all your different options, evaluate those options based on a common set of criteria, figure out how important each

- criterion is, rate each option on each criterion, do the math, and compare the options against each other to see which of your options best fit your needs. The decision was simply a matter of selecting the option with the highest score.
- This is the classical model of decision making, and there is something very appealing and reassuring about it. It is based not on whims or hunches, but on solid analysis and logic. ... It leaves nothing to chance. It promises you a good decision if you follow the process properly...
 - The only problem is that the whole thing is a myth. The reality is that the classical model of decision making doesn't work very well in practice. ... it doesn't do so well in the real world, where decisions are more challenging, situations are more confusing and complex, information is scarce or inconclusive, time is short, and stakes are high. And in that environment, the classical, analytical model of decision making falls flat. "(20)
9. Lehrer, J. (2009). *How We Decide*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
 - When you overthink at the wrong moment, you cut yourself off from the wisdom of your emotions, which are much better at assessing actual preferences. You lose the ability to know what you really want. (143)
 - This is a counterintuitive idea. When making decisions, people almost always assume that more information is better. (160)
 - Alfred P. Sloan, the chairman of General Motors during its heyday, once adjourned a board meeting soon after it began. "Gentlemen," Sloan said, "I take it we are all in complete agreement on the decision here... Then I propose we postpone further discussion of this matter until our next meeting to give ourselves time to develop disagreement and perhaps gain some understanding of what the decision is all about." (218)
 - [T]he brain always learns the same way, accumulating wisdom through error. (249)
 10. Lynch, Dudley & Kordis, Paul L. (1988). *Strategy of the Dolphin: Scoring a win in a chaotic world*. New York, NY: William Morrow
 - "Inside every butterfly there's a caterpillar that succeeded in letting go." (p. 201)
 11. Mauboussin, Michael J. (2009). *Think Twice: Harnessing the power of counter intuition*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Press
 - There's something else that contributes to tunnel vision, and it's something we can all relate to in varying degrees – stress.... too much stress can muddle our thinking by clipping our ability to think long term. (p. 29-30)
 - There's a funny paradox with decision making. Almost everyone realizes how important it is, yet very few people practice. Why don't we drill young students on decision making?" (p. 143)
 12. Patterson, K., Grenny, J., McMillan, R., & Switzler, A. (2002). *Crucial Conversations: Tools for talking when stakes are high*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill
 - "When conversations matter most –... we're generally on our worst behavior." (p. 4)
 - "*When it's unsafe you start to go blind...* when your emotions start cranking up, key brain functions start shutting down. Not only do you prepare to take flight, but your peripheral vision actually narrows. In fact, when you feel genuinely threatened, you can scarcely see beyond what's right in front of you. Similarly, when you feel the outcome of a conversation is being threatened, you have a hard time seeing beyond the point you're trying to make." (p. 50)
 13. Patterson, K., Grenny, J., Maxfield, D., McMillan, R., & Switzler, A. (2008). *Influencer: The power to change anything*, New York, NY: McGraw Hill
 - "Olympic hopefuls work on skills they yet have to master. Club skaters work on skills they've already mastered. Amateurs tend to spend *half* of their time at the rink chatting with friends and not practicing at all." (p. 118-119)

14. Sanaghan, Patrick (2015). 10 Tips to Improve Your Meetings. Academic Impressions: September 9. <http://www.academicimpressions.com/news/10-tips-improve-your-meetings>
- Point 5: Make Sure Everyone Understands the 'Decision Rules' in Advance
- “It is very important that meeting participants clearly understand *how* the group will make decisions. This sounds simple, but often the agreements or rules around decision-making are fuzzy and can create a lot of frustration and confusion for people.
 - “There are several voting conventions you can use to make decisions. For example:
 - Consensus** – Consensus has been reached when everyone agrees that the process has been fair and transparent, people feel heard, good information was used to make the final decision and people are willing to support (not necessarily be happy with) the final decision.
 - Super Majority** – 75% of the group agrees to the decision.
 - Legislative Majority** – 67% of the group agrees to the decision.
 - Simple Majority** – 51% of the group agrees to the decision. Stay away from these types of decisions; due to the minimal support, they will rarely get implemented.”
15. Schein, Edgar H. (2013). *Humble Inquiry: The gentle art of asking instead of telling*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler
- “Humble inquiry is the fine art of drawing someone out, of asking questions to which you do not already know the answer, of building a relationship based on curiosity and interest in the other person” (p. 2)
 - “Humility, in the most general sense, refers to granting someone else a higher *status* than one claims for oneself. To be *humiliated* means to be publicly deprived of one's claimed status, to lose face” (10).
 - “What can be said is that whatever you do when you try to humbly inquire, try to minimize your own preconceptions, clear your mind at the beginning of the conversation, and maximize your listening as the conversation proceeds” (p. 41)
15. Schwartz, Barry. (2015). What 'Learning How to Think' Really Means. The Chronicle of Higher Education, The Chronicle Review, June 18. http://chronicle.com/article/What-Learning-How-to-Think/230965/?cid=cr&utm_source=cr&utm_medium=en
- “It takes courage to be a good listener, because good listeners know that their own views of the world, along with their plans for how to live in it, may be at stake whenever they have a serious conversation.”