

Create Clarity and Make Effective Decisions Every Time

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Both your business and your personal lives are a reflection of all of the decisions you've made up to now. You may have found that the quality of your decisions profoundly affects the quality of your life and work. What do effective decision makers have to teach you that could improve your own skills when you must make difficult choices?

When faced with a complex decision that has significant consequences, everyone has a decision-making style, whether they are conscious of it or not. Knowing how to reach clarity on a decision quickly, especially in critical times, is the mark of accomplished leaders.

The five most common decision difficulties are

- Lack of a clear objective
- Lack of clear constraints
- Difficulties in dealing with emotions (such as fear, guilt, and regret, or emotions resulting from a disagreement)
- Lack of a clear perspective
- Difficulty in selecting among options

Sound familiar? Master decision makers know how to overcome these hurdles and seem to make clear, effective decisions effortlessly. The key to reaching mastery in decision-making is the ability to focus your physical, mental and emotional resources on an issue like a laser beam. It is a skill and it can be learned.

No matter what your decision-making style, you can make better and more consistent choices with better outcomes. Learning these skills will in turn enable clear communication and allow you to lead with passion and conviction.

To master the skill of effective decision-making, you'll need to know yourself, cultivate self-discipline, and continuously scrutinize and improve your decisions. It's not an easy process, but with work, you can eliminate confusion and dramatically increase your clarity. To begin making decisions with clarity faster and easier, consider the following:

1. Know where you stand. Begin with simple record-keeping: list all of the difficult decisions you can recall. Consider what made the situation tough and what method, if any, you used to reach a solution. Once you've amassed this information, you should be able to see patterns and will gain critical information about how you learned to make decisions in your early years and what decision-making habits you've developed over time.

2. Be introspective. All great leaders are willing to look inward and ask difficult questions of themselves. You, too, must be comfortable with this process to become a master decision-maker. Analyze your decision-making record once you've created it and identify common difficulties you've encountered when making decisions. For example, do you see a pattern of finally deciding only when you're under tremendous pressure, choosing whatever seems likely to cause the least pain just when you believe time is

about to run out? Or do you see yourself repeatedly seeing too many facets of the problem or possible solutions, unable to discern which would be best and just randomly choosing?

Questions will naturally arise about your position on certain issues and how your personal goals either work with or conflict with organizational goals. Ask yourself:

- What am I doing well?
- What pattern(s) can I see in the various issues I have encountered in my career and in my life?
- What barriers have I created that stand in the way of my success?

3. Leverage the Clarity State. Set the stage for new insights, ideas, and unexpected breakthroughs by learning to use the Clarity State, the state of being

- Physically relaxed
- Emotionally positive, happy, released from fear and anxiety
- Charged with power, success, self-confidence, and energy
- Totally in the present
- Mentally focused on the task at hand.

While improvements to your decision-making style are possible *without* using it, you'll find that this very powerful and enjoyable state of mind, commonly used by athletes to achieve peak performance, will make it easier and faster to identify and improve your decision-making issues. The Clarity State is similar to a meditative state, in which the mind is cleared of stress, anxiety, racing thoughts, and "noise" that often obscure reflection and insight. Intuition is allowed to come to the fore. Based on research in the fields of neuroscience and psychology, the Clarity State is particular to each individual and offers increased peace of mind as well as improves the speed and quality of decision-making.

4. Develop mind discipline and focus. Contemplating a decision is a different process altogether than our usual rational thought process, and it requires greater focus and control of the mind so you can maintain a coherent state of mind, body, and emotions while considering a decision. To be most effective, you need to achieve balance between regular rational thinking and intuition, and then shift the intuitive into the foreground while backgrounding the rational. This mental flexibility will keep you from resorting to old habits of response and will help to screen out unrelated thoughts as they crop up. Instead, you will find that new and interesting thoughts and ideas will enter your conscious awareness.

Studies have shown that CEOs of larger organizations generally have great mind discipline and control; this ability is developed with experience and correlates directly to the level of achievement in one's career. In other words, the pay-off for learning the mental discipline required to maintain the Clarity state while contemplating a decision is the insights, ideas, and breakthroughs that lead to higher career achievement.

5. Adopt best practices. Once you've identified and enhanced your own decision-making style, it's beneficial to look at those decision-makers you consider effective and emulate them. What can you learn from how others achieve clarity to make decisions that you could incorporate into your own method?

The improvement you decide to incorporate into your style may be small, but with it, your leap to decision-making mastery can be large. For example, you might learn to define your decisions better. The mere awareness of critical decision parameters will bring depth to the overall process.

As effective veteran decision makers know, however, the most powerful recipe for improvement is the combination of being in the Clarity State supported by the discipline of decision definition and methods of overcoming decision difficulties. This combination enables deep insights and breakthrough ideas to surface. With practice, you can unleash this innate power of insight on any issue, problem, or forward-looking strategy.

Stretch Yourself and Have Fun

Embrace the challenges inherent in decision-making. If you can learn to consider the process a game instead of a wall you must constantly beat your head against, you will find yourself having fun, and consequently invent more and more powerful methods that work for you. The final result is less confusion, more clarity, and a decision-making style that is a powerful tool for success in your personal and professional lives.