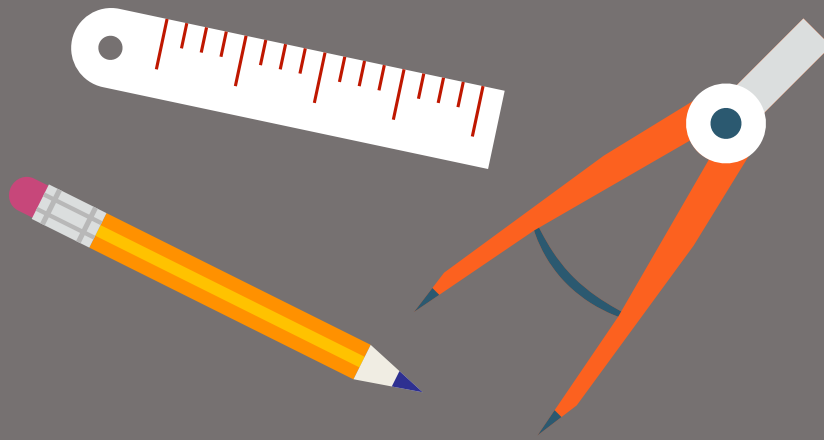


17 Strategies for Making Better Decisions



PRACTICAL TOOLS

17 Strategies for Making Better Decisions

1. The 2-minute rule

Especially if you know yourself to be a bit of a procrastinator, just set an artificial time deadline by which you promise yourself that you will make a decision. For unimportant ones, two minutes is fine. For more important decisions, you can give yourself a little longer (e.g., end of business Thursday). The important thing is to set a deadline.

2. Think black and white

Sometimes we're overwhelmed in our decision making by too many choices. To help narrow them down, just categorize the options as more good or more bad, then eliminate the ones where the bad overshadows the potential good. It may be an oversimplification, but it works, and sometimes it may be necessary.

3. Draw lots or flip a coin

If the choices seem equally good or equally bad and it can't make much difference, it's not the worst idea in the world just to flip a coin. At least it will result in a decision.

4. Focus on the present

Decision making is often held up because of uncertainty about the future. Much of what the future will bring is unknowable. You can't foresee all possible side effects or unintended consequences. If you can't predict with certainty what will be best for the future, just make the decision based on what's best for now.

5. Don't fear failure

Accept that failure is part of any successful process. Failures are great learning opportunities. You can recover from bad decisions if you recognize the mistake early on. Fear of failure just means that someone else will likely get to make the decision.

6. Double-check your intuition

You need good intuition to make sound decisions, but it might be wise to subject your hunches to a sanity check. Ask yourself: "What would my boss or another expert in this area do?"

7. Explain it to a stranger

To ensure that the decision you're about to make is the right one, practice enunciating clearly what your aim is. Can you explain to a total stranger what the problem you're about to solve is, what the goal is that you want to achieve and how the decision you're about to make will get you there?

8. Stick to your values

Sometimes the best solution may seem to be a slightly underhanded tactic that may be expedient but goes contrary to your core values or the values of the organization that you represent. In that case, don't do it. Your company's good reputation for doing the right thing isn't worth it. If you have serious doubts, don't proceed.

9. Be in a good mood

People make better decisions when they're in a good mood – they're optimists and see how things can work. People who are in a bad mood make worse decisions – everything seems to become a self-fulfilling prophecy of doom. Make sure you're in a good mood when you have to make an important decision. Make it after lunch at your favorite restaurant, or after spending some time with your favorite person in the office.

10. Make decisions before you need to

If you wait until the last minute when your back is against the wall, there is a serious risk that the decision will not be the best possible. If you can make it earlier, and you've made it confidently, you have a better chance of success. Besides, you've saved all that time by not waiting!

11. Be a little selfish

Ask yourself if you will be better off with the decision you're about to make. It's better than spending your life doing things for others that you really don't want to be doing, or not having enough time to do the things you really want to do for yourself.

12. Be prepared for the consequences

There will always be consequences, sometimes unintended consequences. Good decision makers realize this and prepare a Plan B or even a Plan C depending on the consequences. They make sure they're never unprepared.

13. Practice the 10/10/10 rule

This rule was popularized by business guru Jack Welch, the former CEO of GE. It goes like this: "Ask yourself how you'll think of your decision 10 minutes from now, 10 months from now and 10 years from now." The answers to those questions will tell you if you're likely to feel instant buyer's remorse, and how well your decision will likely work over the medium term and if it is in accordance with long-term goals. Considering long-term impacts will also help neutralize emotions that can skew short-term decisions.

14. Use numbers where possible

Research showed that judges would make better decisions on which defendants could be released on their own recognizance to make sure that they would show up for trial if they considered two critical factors in a defendant's background: age and any

previous history of failure to appear (FTA) in numbers. The younger the defendant and the fewer number of FTAs, there was practically zero flight risk. Using those statistics, judges were much better off determining who would be a flight risk. What are the critical numbers involved in your decision? Are they known or can you find them?

15. Limit the number of people involved

Research shows that the ideal number of people involved in making good decisions, including outside experts who may be consulted, is 5 to 6. You can widen that “band” to 3 to 7 people. If only one or two people were involved, you may want to widen the circle a bit, if only to ensure greater buy-in. If you have 8 to 12 people involved in the process, find a better way, and if you have 13 or more people making a decision, maybe you’d better find professional help immediately.

16. Measure how decisions turned out

Everything in business needs to be measured, including the decision-making processes. If your decisions met expectations less than half the time, you need to go back to the drawing board and see how you arrive at decisions. If you’re in the 50% to 70% range, you’re not doing so badly. Your failures are great learning opportunities. A better than 70% success rate is outstanding.

17. No regrets

Whatever happens, promise yourself that you won’t endlessly second-guess yourself on the decisions you’ve made. Decisions force us to close the door on the other possibilities. Never mind that nagging thought that the other decision might have been better. It’s over and done with. You just can’t have it all.