

REAL LIFE SOLUTIONS

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Guidelines for Good Decision Making

When the alarm clock goes off in the morning, many people make their first decision of the day: whether to get up or sleep a little longer. Many more decisions will follow throughout the day, both big and small. Some, such as deciding how best to handle a client's request or whether to accept a new job, may be more important than everyday dilemmas. But even decisions that seem unimportant often have long-term effects—for example, choosing to eat lunch at a restaurant every day can end up taking a sizeable chunk out of your budget. It's important to use a framework for good decision making.

Consider the big picture

Before you start the decision-making process, it's important to consider the context in which you will make your decision. Do you have enough time to prepare? Who else will be involved? And, remember that different types of decisions require different approaches. Deciding whether to buy a house, for instance, requires different research and resources than making a decision at work. Keep these basic ideas in mind to help guide you:

- Examine past decisions realistically. Do you have a history of making bad deci-

sions? If so, prepare yourself to overhaul your decision-making process.

- The quality of your research and other preparation directly influences the outcome of your decision. The more room you leave for error, the better the chance that your decision will be successful.
- Always make short-term decisions with long-term implications in mind.
- Avoid indecision and making decisions based on insufficient information.
- Don't make decisions under excessive time pressure.

Create a framework for decision making

Using a step-by-step process is important, especially when making a decision that will have a big impact on your loved ones or colleagues.

- **Define the problem or issue to be decided.** You should have a clear understanding of the decision at hand before you proceed. Make sure you can describe the situation honestly and objectively, and then determine what your goal is. Plan your objectives realistically, but don't be pessimistic.
- **Identify your options.** First, establish criteria against which to measure your choice. What goals must you meet? What resources do you have to reach those goals? If you're making a big play at work, learn the decision-making culture of the company. Find out what methods or choices are acceptable, and which are not. Then list your alternatives. Call on others to help come up with ideas. Ask colleagues

to bring a few ideas to a brainstorming meeting. And remember that people are more likely to support a decision if they've been involved in the process.

- **Evaluate your options.** Do your research, but establish a timetable for your information gathering. Consider the issue from as many different angles as possible. If necessary, ask a specialist on the subject to get involved. For example, you may want to hire a consultant to help create a predictive model to aid a marketing decision.
- **Choose the best option.** Combine your instincts with your research and analysis. First, try to predict all possible outcomes or problems with each alternative. What's the worst-case scenario? And, make sure you take into account the impact each choice would have on colleagues or loved ones. Before you finalize your decision, make a checklist of the factors involved to be sure you have covered all your bases.
- **Implement your decision.** Once your best option is clear, make your decision confidently and quickly. Develop a comprehensive report so you can communicate your decision clearly to those involved. It's important to keep people informed. But before you present your decision, try to find another person to support it. That can help you provide more perspective.
- **Reevaluate your choice if necessary.** Listen to feedback from others. Most importantly, be prepared to make timely adjustments if your decision has not worked as planned.



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