

# Are You a Good Decision Maker?



Decisions, decisions, decisions. It seems like every time we turn around, we have to make more decisions. The question is, “Are you a good decision maker?” If you aren’t, there is no need to worry. Decision-making is a skill that can be learned by anyone. Although some people may find this skill easier than others, everyone applies a similar process.

There are two basic kinds of decisions: those that are arrived at using a specific process and those that just happen. Although both kinds of decisions contain opportunities and learning experiences, there are advantages to using a specific process to make a decision. The most obvious advantage is the reduced level of stress you will experience.

Wise decisions are made using a definite process. They are based on the values and perceptions of the decision-maker and include carefully-considered alternatives and options along with periodic reassessments of the decision and its effects.

## 8 Steps to Wise Decision-Making

This process can be applied to any situation where you need to make an important decision. If you follow these eight basic steps, you will find yourself making wiser decisions in your professional and personal life.

- 1. Define, as specifically as possible, what the decision is that needs to be made.** Is this really your decision or someone else’s? When does the decision need to be made? Why is this decision important to you? Who will be affected by this decision? What values does this decision involve for you?
- 2. Write down as many alternatives as you can think of.** Let your imagination run free and try not to censure anything—this is not the time to be judgmental.
- 3. Think where you could find more information about possible alternatives.** If you only come up with a few alternatives, you may want to get more information. Additional information generally leads to more alternatives.
- 4. Check out your alternatives.** Once you have a list of alternatives, use the same sources of information to find out more about the specifics of each option. You will find that the more information you gather, the more ideas will pop into your head. Be sure to write these down and check them out too.

- 5. Visualize the outcomes of each alternative.** For each remaining alternative on your list, picture what the outcome of that alternative will look like. Here, too, it helps if you write out your impressions.
- 6. Do a reality check.** Which of your remaining alternatives are most likely to happen? Cross off those alternatives that most likely will not happen to you.
- 7. Get started!** Once you have made your decision, get moving on it. Worrying or second-guessing yourself will only cause grief. You have done your very best for the present; you always have the option of changing your mind in the future. Remember, no decision is set in stone.
- 8. Review your decision at specified points along the road. Are the outcomes what you expected?** Are you happy with the outcomes? If the decision did not come out the way you planned, go through the decision-making process again. In the process, answer the following questions: Did I not have enough information? What values came into play? Were they my values or someone else’s? Remember, you can always change your mind and make adjustments.

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## Common Decision-Making Mistakes

Below is a list of the most common decision-making mistakes. By learning about these pitfalls now, you will be able to avoid them in the future.

- **Relying too much on expert information.** Often times, people tend to place too much emphasis on what experts say. Remember, experts are only human and have their own set of biases and prejudices just like the rest of us. By seeking information from a lot of different sources, you will get much better information than if you focused all your energy on only one source.
- **Underestimating the value of information received from others.** Whether we realize it or not, we also lean towards discounting information we receive from individuals such as children, low socio-economic status groups, women (yes, believe it!), the elderly, homemakers, etc. This is unfortunate since many times these groups can paint a good picture of the other side of your problem. In other words, these groups may use entirely different values and perceptions in their answers to your questions. The result is a larger perspective of what the issues really are. Just make a note that if you find yourself discounting the information you receive from anyone, make sure you ask yourself why.
- **Not listening to your feelings or gut reactions.** Have you ever made a decision only to have it be followed by a major stomach ache or headache? In moments when we need to make a decision, our bodies provide clues to the answer through feelings or gut reactions. Unfortunately, our society teaches us to ignore these feelings, but by tuning into your intuition, you will find that you will make much better decisions in the long run.

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