

WRAP Up Better Decisions

By Susan Schilke; September 3, 2019

My daughter and colleague, Samantha, is getting married next year. She made the big decision say yes, and now has a thousand decisions to make about her wedding. I've recommended she read one of my favorite books for leaders, Decisive, for some insights on how to improve the quality of decisions. You should, too.

At TeamStrength, we make great business leaders better and the primary effect we want to achieve is that members feel confident they are making better decisions for their companies and team members. So I am a big fan of Chip and Dan Heath's book on what we need to do to improve the quality of our decisions.

We make decisions, large and small, constantly. If you're like me, you can immediately think of some great decisions you've made... and some not so great ones. How is that smart people like us go wrong in our decision-making process? Here are some things that trip us up, and what to do about them.

1. **We think either/or and whether or not.** This is a pretty limited framework. We almost always have more options, but we get stuck – Do we buy this car or not? Should we promote John or Karen? Do we open this branch or not? The solution to this one is simple – **Widen your options.** Consider more choices – in fact, mentally eliminate the choices you have now. What would you do? Consider opportunity cost. What else could you do with the same resources of time and money? Find people who have done what you're considering and learn from them. Get outside your limits for better decisions.
2. **We suffer from confirmation bias.** Once we are leaning toward a certain decision, and we tend to do that quickly, we do something deliberate in our research. We only look for information that supports our thinking, versus objectively seeking out information with an open mind. **Reality test your assumptions** by actively seeking out the downsides and negatives. Ask yourself – why is this a bad idea? And then get some answers. Project the decision being a disaster and find the problems with your plan. Get data and expertise on the cons, not just the pros!
3. **We think short-term.** We are motivated to avoid pain and we love instant gratification. These two emotions create short-term thinking and that can hurt decision making. **Attain some distance** by using the 10/10/10 process. How will you feel about the decision 10 minutes from now? What about 10 months? How about 10 years? Often the choice that is painful in the short-term makes the longer term better. Shift your perspective – ask yourself what advice you'd give to a friend or co-working facing the same decision? It's easier to encourage others to look past the short-term gain or delayed gratification.
4. **We get emotional,** and in particular we're often too confident in outcomes. **Prepare to be wrong** by looking at worst-case scenarios and asking yourself what could go wrong? Set a tripwire for the decision – a timeline, limit or safety net – in advance that triggers a reevaluation of the decision. David Lee Roth earned a reputation for asking for no brown M&Ms in the dressing room. But he wasn't being a diva, it was a test to see if the venue had read the contract and followed the specs. If not, it could be dangerous for the band or crew. The M&Ms were a tripwire, and triggered a different course of action.
5. **We don't get enough information.** This is really risky in decision making. To overcome it, use the steps above (the **WRAP** process), and **involve people in the decision.** We're tempted to avoid decision by committee, because it slows down the process and it's tough to find solutions that make everyone happy. But it dramatically improves the success of the decision and increases the implementation time.

Members use this thinking in every TeamStrength meeting to improve the quality of decisions. They actively seek out more options before bringing to decision to the group, and then their fellow members widen their options even more. And members challenge each other's ideas and point out some of the brutal facts. They provide the perspective of distance, and offer guidance on what could go wrong to improve the quality and success of decisions. And quite often we'll hear members suggest collaborating internally as a next step.

I recommend every leader read Decisive. And then use these steps on your most important business and personal decisions. Samantha is reading the book now. It should provide invaluable insights into assisting our members in TeamStrength, and making the best choices for her big day!