

Deliberate Decision Making

Life is but a relay of experiences and decisions, each impacting and building on the other, taking us either to a mind state of heaven or hell. - Coach Kotak

While events may happen to us, our experience in that event is greatly influenced by our decisions. Someone screams at us or cuts in front of our vehicle; we decide a tit-for-tat or stay calm and respond productively. Someone smiles at us; we can decide to smile back or ignore. In either case our decision will define our experience and our mind state in the next moment.

Hence, decision-making as a skill is a pre-requisite for success in work and in life. It is an important leadership skill and like any other skill, it can also be learnt. Starting with understanding the difference between decisions and deliberate decisions. In other words, taking decisions one 'has to' make, as against the decisions one 'wants to' make.

This shift from, want to, to have to, is not just a switch of one word but a journey that starts with paradigm, that is an entire system of assumptions, concepts, values, and practices that constitute a way of viewing reality based on widely accepted beliefs or concepts. In my vast expanse of experience, I found that people make most decisions based on their values. A person's value will determine how they will perceive any situation. However, I have also found that there is often confusion or lack of clarity between our practiced values and our aspired values. This clarity greatly supports deliberate decision making. Your values drive your actions and motivate your goals. Your goals help you establish your priorities in your life, further guiding your decision making and affect evaluation of your success and happiness in life.

Some commonly and widely accepted approaches are also used by corporation managers to help them in their decision-making process.

- Some use 'Command' approach where decisions are made by themselves with no involvement of team members. These managers are internally driven and do not feel the need to ask and discuss. They believe it will be a waste of time and energy.
- Another approach is 'Consult' where inputs from others are invited to help in the process of decision making.
- The 'Voting' approach is considered most democratic, here options are discussed and then there is call for a vote.
- 'Consensus' is where talks continue till everyone agrees to one decision.

People are afraid of upsetting the balance & inherently fear change, so they prefer sticking with the status quo.

There is always the underlying worry that our decision may be biased, unfair or counterproductive. This concern can often make managers get caught in some hidden traps of decision making. Let us explore some of these.

- ‘Anchoring’ and relying on first impressions to make crucial decisions is a common occurrence. The new decision is based on first impressions or earlier yard sticks. While it may be a tried and tested method it is not necessarily the best.
- Another trap is ‘Refusing to leave your echo chamber’. Decisions here are based only on what your community tells you. This may make you miss the bigger picture altogether.
- ‘Not framing the question properly’, can fail to convey the purpose of what we are looking for. Managers can get caught in this non-productive loop and unwittingly get waylaid.
- ‘Lessons from the past,’ holds us hostage to the past. Decisions, purely based on that, will take away the experience of possibilities in the present moment.

What then is a more productive way to make decisions?

This is a question that we have collectively sought to answer in my training programs on ‘Leadership and Management Skills’.

In my opinion there are certain considerations that can help to improve your decision-making skills:

- Gain clarity on aspired values and practiced values and then set goals and priorities that support your plans.
- Be assertive, lead the decision-making process.
- Ask an expert if you are feeling lost or need help.
- Keep it in perspective
- Limit choices
- Weigh your options carefully
- Set deadlines

Amazon, founder and CEO, Jeff Bezos, is particularly famous for his attitude of, ‘speed matters’. He believes that time is of essence, and one must be swift to take decisions as it is crucial to success. This philosophy helped him steer his company to phenomenal growth in a very short time.

World over managers follow his unconventional, controversial but practical tips of:

- Not using a one-size fits all approach, as some decisions are reversible and can use a lightweight process.

- Time being a crucial factor, decisions should be made when 70% of the information is in, as there may not be enough time to collect all the information.
- “Disagree and commit”, is a brilliant phase to get team members to play along. Often when taking a vote during decision making, there may be few who will disagree. By allowing them to disagree and yet get them to play along will save a lot of time. At that point, most will not know the outcome or the right answer and are most likely to commit.
- ‘Recognize true misalignment issues early and escalate them immediately’ when teams are not aligned as they have fundamentally different views and different objective, matters need to be escalated and dealt with quickly. Prerequisite mind-set towards effective decision-making is, reinforcing a bias for action, as it’s better than delayed action due to indecisiveness.

Indecisiveness stems from the need to take right decisions, based on certainty. The truth is, there never is enough time to ponder over every detail, to make a good decision and the ‘best decision’ is a myth.

Recently in a Webinar with managers, on ‘Effective Decision Making’, where I took them through the NLP technique of ‘3 Mentors of Heart, Head and Gut’, a question was raised, “what if after trying the NLP 3 mentors’ technique and other traditional decision-making methods, if we yet did not feel aligned to make a deliberate decision what can be done?”

Personally, I feel, that if one has tried everything on a Critical Decision, and are still not aligned, sometimes all that it needs is a leap of faith and the readiness to experience the unexpected?

When we are open to making decisions that may feel tough, in that moment, it may teach us something to bring better results in future rather than becoming stagnant in the comfort zone.

Having said that I feel, there is no one answer but one can reflect on the following:

- a) Have you generated at least 3-5 perspectives to the situation?
- b) Acknowledge your gut instinct but do not get carried away by it. Allow your intellect to dissect it.
- c) Have you acknowledged the emotions at play or did you allow the emotions to play on you.
- d) Are you taking the decision for peace of mind (immediate or short term) or are you taking the decision with peace of mind.
- e) Weigh your choices against resolution and peace of mind. Take a decision that best resolves the situation even when it is tough and painful now. Avoid the decision that gives peace of mind in the present, as it is most likely to bring pain in future.
- f) Is the decision in the immediate term taking you a step closer to your purpose, making you productive and allowing you to deal with the situation more effectively in the moment?

Do keep in mind, that the outcome of any decision is debatable in hindsight, the decision may significantly vary if debated a few years later. So, like I shared earlier, there is no perfect decision and the only time for conscious deliberate decision is now!

To learn more about making your journey from 'want to' to 'have to', or learn how you can become better at making Deliberate Decisions, reach out to coachkotak@autsur.com

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