

CAREER HEALTH

Decisions - No Big Deal, Right?

By Jan Richards

Wrong! Decision-making is where the strengths and weaknesses of a team – or a company – rapidly become apparent. Ask a senior manager or any employee at your company how well the decision-making works. You're likely to hear frustration and at least a few ideas about how to make better decisions, such as:

- Decisions never really happen around here; or if they do, they take forever. Everyone has an opinion on everything. Nobody has any real facts.

- We spend a lot of time gathering loads of information, and then our manager does what he wants, even if the data we gather points to a different direction than the one he takes.

- The team makes a decision, but as soon as the meeting is over and the members go their separate ways, many of them undercut the decisions. There's no real teamwork in our group, just the appearance of it in meetings.

Do any of these comments sound familiar? If so, there are ways you can improve the decision-making process, enabling you to save time and money and improve the goodwill of your employees.

1. Decide How to Decide

Before your group meets to discuss a new project or issue, choose the people who will contribute to the decision and what role each person will play. Communicate the process and roles to everyone involved, so you eliminate the potential for misunderstanding. Additional questions to consider include:

- Who usually makes this type of decision and how – independently, in a group, by consensus, majority vote?

- Whom does this decision affect? What impact does this decision have?

- How will you best spend your time during the process? Determine what you can delegate and what you must do yourself.

- What are the largest risks involved in making this decision, and how can you reduce those risks?

- Do you have prior experience you can draw on to make this decision?

- Are the deadlines real? Does your team really need to make a decision now?

- What natural biases do you have that could influence the way you seek or evaluate the information necessary to make a decision?

2. Frame the Decision

Be clear about the problem you're addressing. Create a clear, common vision of a good decision and its outcome. This can take some time, but it's time well spent, as it focuses the rest of the decision-making process.

3. Gather Information

Decide what information you must have to make the decision and when and how you need it. It's easy to spend a lot of time and effort gathering information that's not actually needed or used.

Make sure to gather some information that tests and challenges your basic assumptions in case they're wrong. This is especially important in situations where conditions are changing rapidly and the cost of a wrong decision is high.

4. Decide – Draw a Conclusion

When the pressure is on, as it often is, stick with the well-planned process you've created. This is especially important – and difficult – if the team is losing focus and starting to react rather than act. Keep everyone directed towards the clear vision you used to frame your decision at the beginning of the process.

If you can't draw a conclusion, identify what the barriers are and resolve them. Then try again. This may take longer than you had planned, or feel you can take, but you're likely to spend less time than if you don't pause to fix the problem – even if you consult an outside expert to help. You don't want your team stuck in a "spin cycle" of inaction or infighting, which can be very expensive and damaging to the group.

5. Evaluate and Improve

Set up a way to learn from the process you've used, so you can improve decision-making in the future. When enough time has passed to see the results, but not so much that it's no longer fresh, take some time to:

- Record what you thought would happen, your assumptions and predictions.

- Compare the results with what you expected to occur. To learn and improve, you need to take an honest look at how the process worked – or didn't.

Finally, keep in mind that decision-making is a process; and like any process, you can improve it – often significantly.

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The Eight Limbs of Yoga

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pratyahara, dharana is the ability to be completely, internally absorbed and focused. This practice of single-pointed concentration stills the mind and leads to profound quietness within. **Dhyana** - Following on from dharana is dhyana, or meditation – sitting where there is no focus, just stillness; no thoughts, only emptiness. **Samadhi** - In this state of absolute personal freedom there is union of the individual soul with the universal soul. It is the practice of living at one with all that is.

With regular yoga you will get strength, flexibility and good health, the benefits of which flow into all aspects of life. Increased energy levels bring a new perspective on life; the increased feelings of self-love and inspiration lead us to discover talents and interests we never knew existed and problems that once seemed overwhelming become more manageable.

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"Don't ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive, and go do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive."

-Howard Thurman

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Because Making Smart Choices About Your Money Impacts The Quality of Your Life

Over the years, we have found that there are elements of your life that are more important than money.

These elements - Physical Health, Relationship Health, Inner Health and Career Health - cannot be delegated.

We hope that you find these articles to be of value in improving the quality of your life.

PHYSICAL HEALTH

The Eight Limbs of Yoga

By Yoga Supplies

Yoga refers to traditional physical and mental disciplines originating in India. It focuses upon developing a healthy mind and body, and on attaining self-awareness. The various practices and disciplines of yoga are available to everyone, no matter what the culture or other paths they may follow. Yoga practice also involves developing awareness on a universal and personal level through the yamas and niyamas, a series of ethics and disciplines intended to cultivate living in harmony with others and in oneness with our true selves.

Yoga has been practiced for thousands of years and consists of ancient theories, observations and principles regarding the connection of the mind with the body. The ancient Indian sage systemized yoga philosophy into eight paths or limbs: yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana, samadhi. These limbs each express a different aspect of yoga and combined make up the path or yoga prac-

tice that unites the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual levels of our being.

Yama - Yama are ethical disciplines that relate to how we can live in a shared world with peace and integrity. **Niyama** - These disciplines relate to the individual and focus on living a healthy, fulfilled and masterful life. **Asana** - The word asana means 'to be', in the sense of being in a posture. The asanas were developed for the maintenance of a healthy mind and body, with each posture affecting the body, mind and emotions in a unique way and working as a pathway to balance and wellbeing. **Pranayama** - In the practice of pranayama, we develop breathing techniques that increase oxygen intake and strengthen lung capacity while also increasing the absorption of prana, or life force. In its simplest form, pranayama involves deep, full breathing. **Dharana** - Following on from

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RELATIONSHIP HEALTH

Creating Effective & Efficient Relationships

By Article Street

Relationships of all kinds are often perceived as very delicate things that require extra effort to maintain. However, a relationship can also be something that can provide security and can also be long lasting despite many trials.

Building effective and lasting relationships is a necessity for several reasons. For example in a group or organization, the well being of the people depends on how efficient and effective that group or organization works.

The group or organization is also dependent on how well the members work with the management.

An ineffective group or organization can really be very frustrating. An effective group or organization can also ask so much of their members, that sometimes the members would have no life outside the walls of the area where they work or sacrifice the other aspects of their life just to meet deadlines. For an organization or group with this kind of scenario, relationships can be stressed or suffer from breakdown.

People or other entities who depend on these groups or organizations also suffer.

Society is defined as a web of relationships, which requires all parties to work and contribute their share in order to achieve a common goal. Having a relationship that is good, where cooperation and respect are manifested, can make society work better. In this way each member works for the good of the whole and towards achieving a common goal. This can only be attained with effective and efficient relationships.

Understanding the other parties' feelings and positions creates an effective and efficient relationship. The easiest method to understand what is important to another party is to ask them what they want and lis-

ten to what they have to say. When the other party realizes this, they will feel the importance given to them

Effective and efficient relationships require parties to openly express their feelings and positions on all matters pertinent to the relationship. Assuming that the other party understands our needs is not a good practice.

Respect is the key to relationships. In order to create a more effective relationship, parties should treat each other with respect. We can show respect just by

“Success means having the courage, the determination, and the will to become the person you believe you were meant to be.”

-George Sheehan

listening to the other party and by trying sincerely to understand how they function. You can also show respect to other parties by confirming that they are doing everything they can.

The opposite of respect is the forming of judgments based on unfounded facts and prejudice.

Respect is the very foundation for a great relationship. This also means respecting yourself and respecting others.

Another key area in forming an effective relationship is to tackle differences with the other party directly. Differences between parties or people are quite interesting. For example, in a conversation where each party listens to the other party, you may observe that each has two different perspectives.

Work toward a win-win solution for both parties.

This can be done when at least one party acknowledges that the relationship is important. That party would then exert more time, effort and energy to understand the other party's needs and deal with it to get it out of the way. Should they fail, it is comfortable for that party to know that they tried.

Effectively listening and not pre-judging is important if parties are to understand each other.

Informal discussions are conducive for parties. They bring out issues and concerns comfortably. They also feel more relaxed making them think more clearly.

Developing an atmosphere where the other party can express their feelings when they need to is vital.

When parties fail to express whatever is on their minds or their feelings, then this can get in the way of building an effective relationship.

Parties should be aware that certain things exist naturally but should be controlled in any dealings in any relationship. Human nature is one. Some of these things found in a relationship also include: a history of stereotyping or mistrust, blaming the other person or party for a strained relationship, excluding the other party's feelings when focusing on a task, no clear and defined objectives, roles and expectations of each party in a relationship is also unclear.

Relationships are important to everyone; addressing issues and problems right away is a must to further improve the relationship. As they say “No man is an Island”.

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INNER HEALTH

Smoothing Out the Ripple Effect

By Dianna Booher

The way you approach your in-box, work-space, and filing has as much to do with how much you get done in a day as does the number and size of your projects. Follow these steps to define and then streamline work habits, patterns, and methods.

Optimize Your Scheduling; Build White Space into Your Calendar. To schedule your work most effectively, do not schedule enough tasks to consume every working and waking moment. You should plan for about 80 percent capacity when you're going to be in the office and about 50 percent capacity just after returning from a trip. That means for a 50-hour work week, schedule about 40 hours of work, knowing that another 10 hours of “stuff” will appear unexpectedly.

Avoid Work-and-Wait Patterns. Waiting for approvals, opinions, information, equipment, or resources is a major time waster. Here are some tactics that can minimize, if not prevent, slow-downs:

- Get other people's buy-in on the due dates before you schedule tasks.
- Offer to help people do the work or collect the information you need.
- Let people know you don't have to have the information “in formal/final form.”

Escalate the problem to your supervisor to negotiate the information at a higher level. Remind everyone involved that you need the information as soon as it's available.

Be Wary of High-Tech, Time-Saving Devices. High-tech may mean high-time. Before buying any “time-saving” gadget, consider the hidden investment of time in its use - time to select and purchase the appropriate item, time to learn how to operate it, time to set it up and store it and secure it, time to refurbish or repair it, time to insure it and replace it.

It's important to recognize that low-tech items like the pencil, broom, razor blade, spoon, and bucket can be real time-savers themselves

Clutter Your To-Do List, Not Your Mind. Your mind can hold only about seven chunks of information at once. Why push your luck?

Do you frequently have flashes of brilliance when you're in the shower, out for a walk, driving the freeway? Write them down immediately rather than juggle them in your mind.

Those who make lists stay on target and save time between tasks and ideas with-

“Things may come to those who wait...but only the things left by those who hustle.”

-Abraham Lincoln

out wondering what comes next. Those who don't make lists are at the mercy of events, memory, and mediocrity.

Equip Multiple Places of Existence. Wherever you need to do work, have what you need—paper, pen, stamps, stationery, stapler and extra staples, rubber bands, binder clips, phone, calculator, computer, food. With the routine tools at hand, you can FINISH all these petty little projects while you're waiting in the car, in the line, in the lobby.

Get a transport system for what you have to carry back and forth. Sorting and packing and then resorting and repacking into your briefcase can be a time-consuming chore. If you have several continuing projects, then have a bag, case, or binder for each.

Create Systems and Routines for the Daily Duties. Systems and routines make things faster, cheaper, better. If you collect the same information over and over, can you compile a form to hand to your customer or employee? If you give out the same answers to the same questions, can you prepare a flyer to make available to visitors and callers? If you give the same instructions for operating the same equipment, can you post the procedure near the equipment? If you respond to customers about the same products, can you create boilerplate letters and proposals ready for customizing? If you have a typical weekly staff meeting, can you use the same boilerplate agenda for customizing?

Work in Marathons. Marathons serve two motivations: To catch up or to get ahead. When you feel as though you're slipping further and further behind, decide to do a work marathon to catch up. Arrive early. Work late. Send out for food. Don't allow interruptions. Don't rework anything. Work fast and don't look up between projects. Put in three or four days like that, and you'll feel caught up enough to face the world again.

On other occasions, you may have monumental tasks before you and want to get a jump start on them. Schedule a marathon and make it a big deal. The exhilaration from what you accomplish will more than reduce the fatigue from the actual work.

When you get things done quickly, efficiently, and on schedule, not only do you impress your boss and your coworkers, but you create a sense of accomplishment that satisfies yourself as well. The next time you feel like you just can't get organized, try implementing a few or all of these tips to build momentum.

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