

DECISION MAKING

The basic fundamental of effective management

By Ian Handricks

Managers have ONE job – that is to MAKE DECISIONS!

Many people, when asked, define a manager as a person that; manages (that answer is meaningless - it's like saying a builder builds, a painter paints ...), hires, fires, makes a plan for production, organizes the resources required to achieve certain tasks, oversees production etc. The tasks a manager are involved with can be extensive but there is one undeniable fact – every one of those tasks requires the manager to make decisions!

A decision is defined as “a choice that you make about something after thinking about it”.

Decision-making is the most important component of a manager's activities. It plays the most important role in the planning process. When the managers plan, they decide on many matters as what goals their organisation will pursue, what resources they will use, and who will perform each required task.

You are not managing if you do not make decisions!

Effective decision making requires wisdom from all who are involved in the process – up and down the hierarchical chart. Those who are in a position that need to approve a decision and those who have to action a decision need to understand how to ensure the process works efficiently.

There is no doubt, despite best efforts, questionable decisions can be made, indeed bad decisions can be made! The easiest way to destroy confidence and initiative is to admonish the person who made a questionable decision. If they are reprimanded for their poor decision – it will almost certainly prevent them from making any further ones.

The correct way to handle these types of decisions is to first say, “Thank you for that idea, it's an interesting decision, however, have you considered” – completing the statement with an alternative proposal that might be more workable than their idea.

Likewise, those who are expected to act upon a decision could say something similar if they consider the request to be flawed, such as, “That's an interesting decision, boss, however, have you considered” – completing the statement with an alternative proposal that might be more workable than their idea.

This concept works perfectly up and down the organizational chart without destroying the confidence of the prime decision maker.

Don't make the same decision twice. Spend the time and thought to make a solid decision the first time so that you don't revisit the issue unnecessarily. If you're too willing to reopen issues, it interferes not only with your execution but also with your motivation to make a decision in the first place. After all, why bother deciding an issue if it isn't really decided? People hate indecisive leadership so you have to make choices.

All managerial activities involve a lot of decision making, and it is first-rate decision making skills that lead to the best decisions. A good manager needs to think rationally, analyse variables effectively and strategize with skill. Otherwise, when the puzzle is finished, there will still be unused pieces.

People procrastinate over making any "thinking" decision. If it is going to take brain power, you are going to have to write stronger and say it better, if you are to gain immediate action. You must give your audience a reason (or several) to respond now – your team is looking to you to make well thought out, achievable and targeted decisions.

There are many ways you can become an effective decision maker:

1. Insist that when someone comes to you with a problem that they MUST provide a suggested solution (that will improve their decision making skills and it will make your job significantly easier) – you should not entertain any discussion about problems unless they have offered that suggested solution – send them away to re-think!
2. Do not procrastinate – make a decision (good or bad)
3. Do not get the team together to make a decision as a group – rule 1 applies – you must have a suggested solution before consulting the team
4. Communicate your decisions with clarity and without ambiguity
5. Do not make multiple decisions for the same issue (“We can do A, B or C” is not a decision!)
6. Consult with others about your decisions once you have made them (not before) – alter them before proclamation if there is compelling insight
7. Do not delegate your decision making responsibilities – you should offer to resign if you need to do that!
8. Don't let stress get the better of you.
9. Give yourself some time (if possible).
10. Weigh the pros and cons.
11. Think about your goals and values.
12. Consider all the possibilities.
13. Identify the risks you take
14. Stop thinking about the problem – think about the solution
15. Consider the opposite – what will happen if we don't follow the course of action you have decided upon
16. Use elimination – consider a number of options and eliminate those most likely to be ineffective – leave one as the key to your decision

Summary:

- Managers have ONE job – that is to MAKE DECISIONS!
- A decision is defined as “a choice that you make about something after thinking about it”.
- Effective decision making requires wisdom from all who are involved in the process
- Don't make the same decision twice
- Practice the 16 steps to becoming an effective decision maker

Problem solving (using the problem)

Often problems seem to have no solution. The colleague that cannot seem to adapt to a particular situation, a growing sense of unproductiveness, working with people who cannot or will not change bad habits and a host of other situations where traditional problem-solving methods just don't seem to work. I believe that the problem itself can help find a solution.

John and I had owned the contact lens lab for a little while now and we had about 80 in the team. It was in the years prior to wide-spread cell-phone usage. A wall-mounted telephone was provided by us for all to use in moderation.

One technician used the phone to excess, she was chatting on the phone regularly and her productivity was suffering as a result. Many attempts had been made by me and John tried to rein in her use of the phone – always to no avail. She just ignored our pleas to reduce her use of the phone and continued unabated.

Eventually John decided enough was enough and discussed with me the need to terminate her employment. I thought for a moment and decided that there was a better solution – Use the problem to solve the problem. I discussed my idea with John and to say he was skeptical would be an understatement! We called the lady into the office and she arrived with some deal of apprehension.

I said “We have a problem!”, at which point she looked worried, I then said “the telephone was being overused and that was affecting productivity” ... now she was very concerned! I continued by saying, “We would like to promote you to the position of ‘Communications Supervisor’ and ask you to take responsibility for those who use the phone”.

I added, “We would like you to manage the phone, advise anyone using it too long or too often to reduce their usage”. I produced a badge saying “Communications Supervisor” and she was quite taken aback. She thanked us and proceeded to watch that phone like a hawk ... she controlled the usage as if her life depended on it ... she NEVER herself used the phone again! Her productivity went through the ceiling! What's more, she was delighted to have the power and responsibility and to be recognised for her contribution.

Workshop

Scenario 1

You have a team that interface with the public. Despite on a number of occasions discussing with a particular team member about their abrasive and abrupt nature during the client interview process, they continue to behave badly. This is affecting the other members of your team and the clients are complaining. What do you decide to do?

Scenario 2

Your team uses a number of items from stock in the course of their work. You have been informed that due to the increased shipping costs caused by COVID-19, that you must reduce the consumption of excess stock due to high waste levels. The team currently discard 15% of all stock due to a number of reasons including mis-handling, over-supply to patients, incorrect application and allowing stock to go out-of-date due to inefficiencies of booking procedures. What do you decide to do?

Scenario 3

You have been asked by management to introduce a new customer service using your existing team. You have also been advised that there is no additional budget allocated for this and that hiring more staff is not an option. What do you decide to do?