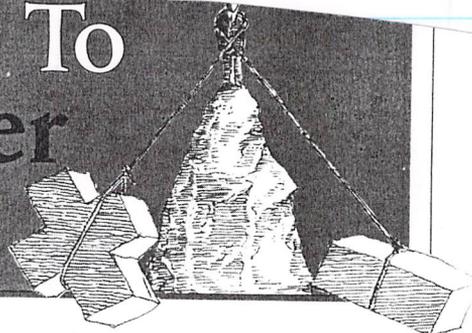


Better Way To Make Better Decisions



Most people lack confidence in their abilities to make good decisions. Afraid to make a mistake, they either act on impulse...or put off making a choice until circumstances make the decision for them. Either way, they wind up with unsatisfying results. But decision making is not all that difficult. You just need a system.

In order to find a very effective system, I spent several years observing how people make decisions. During the process, I stopped thinking in terms of *good* and *bad* decisions.

To many of us, *good* means *perfect*—and aiming for perfection immobilizes us. Instead, I strive to make *better* decisions than I used to.

I found that the key to making a better decision is simple—*ask yourself better questions*. If you ask yourself the right questions, you can make an effective decision in very little time.

Better questions rely on both your *head* and your *heart* for guidance. “Head” questions help you determine, *Is this practical?* “Heart” questions ask, *Does this feel right to me?* Most people habitually rely on one of the two—either head or heart—but not both. That’s a big mistake. Relying on head *and* heart guides us to choices that are sensible as well as satisfying.

I have identified six questions—three for the head, three for the heart—that can illuminate almost any decision. It’s not necessary to ask yourself all six questions. In fact,

one question to the head and one to the heart are all you really need.

Focus on the two questions that strike you as most relevant. You will probably be able to answer them quickly.

HEAD QUESTIONS

Question 1: Is this something I want...or something I really need?

Wants and needs are easily confused. We would be much happier over the long term if we made decisions based on what we need, rather than being swayed by temporary or superficial desires.

Example: You’ve been dating someone for a few months, and you’re deciding whether to make a commitment. You may *want* this person because he/she is attractive, wealthy and well-built.

But if you think about what you *need* in a relationship, you may realize that includes a sense of humor, the capacity for honesty and a passion for life. If your attractive companion doesn’t have these qualities, getting more involved is likely to leave you disappointed.

Another way of looking at this question—*When I look back a year from now, what would I like to have done?*

Question 2: Am I aware of all my options? A common justification for an unsatisfying decision is, *I had no choice*. But people usually have far more options than they

first realize. Often, simply asking this question is enough to make you aware of alternatives. But it's also a good idea to gather information. This is a simple process—all you have to do is keep your eyes and ears open. Read...pick up the phone and talk to friends and strangers who have knowledge of the issue...observe how other people have handled similar situations.

Example: My wife and I recently built a home in Hawaii. Before we chose the construction materials, our contractor told us that shipping lumber and supplies from the mainland US would be much too expensive. Therefore, we would be limited to what was available on the island.

Instead of taking his word for it, we called lumber mills and shipping companies in the continental US and found that we could build more cheaply and quickly by using their services. We built our home for half the cost—and three times more quickly—than if we had followed the contractor's recommendation.

Question 3: What are the probable consequences? A more detailed version of this question is, *If I choose this option, what will probably happen? And then what will probably happen after that? And then what?* These questions encourage you to think beyond the immediate to the potential outcome of your decision—and whether you will be happy with it.

Example: Your company has been steadily laying off employees in your division. You can't decide whether to (1) start looking for another job or (2) hang on and hope you don't get fired.

Probable consequences of Option 1: You make valuable contacts...learn more about what's going on in your field...eventually land a new, more secure position, though it may not happen right away.

Probable consequences of Option 2: You feel anxious, irritable and resentful...you could keep your job but in an environment that fosters insecurity and frustration...or you could lose your job and experience a crippling setback in your self-esteem—because you let someone else determine your destiny.

HEART QUESTIONS

Question 4: Am I telling myself the truth? Too often, the answer is *no*. We tell ourselves what we want to hear.

Another way to approach this question is to ask yourself, *What do my friends think?* Not that you should automatically do what everyone else thinks is right...but your friends are likely to be more objective and see pitfalls that you refuse to acknowledge.

Question 5: Does this feel right? "Rightness" is hard to define, but you know it when you feel it. If your mind can't come

up with the answer, consult your body. Does thinking about the option make you feel energized...or drained?

Question 6: What would I do if I weren't afraid? *Alternative phrasing: What would I do if I deserved better?* Our fears may seem realistic, but we often hold ourselves back by imagining things to be worse than they are. Just because a particular option makes you afraid doesn't mean it is the wrong one. Don't let fear make the decision for you—or keep you from making any decision at all. ■