

# *Strategic Development Initiatives, LLC*

*Personal and Professional Women's Leadership Coaching*

*Karen McGee, Chief Development Officer and Principal*

## **Resources for Effective Decision Making - A Valuable Leadership Capability**

**"Nothing is more difficult, and therefore more precious, than to be able to decide."**

*--Napoleon Bonaparte*

We make decisions all the time. We can't escape decision making. Even *not* making a decision is still a decision. So, since we can't avoid making decisions and the ultimate goal of decision making is to make the best choice for guiding future action, it's good to have some resources available. It's particularly important for those who lead others to have good decision making skills for obvious reasons.

At a website devoted entirely to decision making (and probably inactive now), you can find the following paragraph introducing the page entitled *Decision Making Process* (<http://decision-quality.com/intro.php>)

"Decision-making is one of the defining characteristics of leadership. It's core to the job description. Making decisions is what managers and leaders are paid to do. Yet, there isn't a day that goes by that you don't read something in the news or the business press that makes you wonder, "What were they thinking?" or "Who actually made that decision?" That's probably always been the case, but it seems exponentially more so in the opening decade of the new millennium where everything seems marked with, "too big, too fast, too much, and too soon."

The rest of the Decision Making Process page is very interesting but since the download links for the white papers weren't operational and with a copyright date of 2008 on the site, it's most likely no longer working. Even though not all of the resources are accessible, it's still worth the effort to take a look.

**Jonah Lehrer** has this to say about making good decisions in his book, **How We Decide**.

"The simple truth of the matter is that making good decisions requires us to use both sides of the mind. For too long, we've treated human nature as an either/or situation. We are either rational or irrational. We either rely on statistics or trust our gut instincts. There's Apollonian logic versus Dionysian feelings; the id against the ego; the reptilian brain fighting the frontal lobes. Not only are these dichotomies false, they're destructive. There is no universal solution to the problem of decision-making. The real world is just too complex. As a result, natural selection endowed us with a brain that is enthusiastically pluralist. Sometimes we need to reason through our options and carefully analyze the possibilities. And sometimes we need to listen to our emotions. The secret is knowing when to use these different styles of thought. We always need to be thinking about how we think."

**Chip and Dan Heath** report on our success as decision-makers in their recently published book, **Decisive, How to Make Better Choices in Life and Work**. In it they identify the 4 villains of decision making, and then introduce a simple but enormously useful four-step process for making better choices. The authors say their goal is to make us a bit better at making good decisions and they want to help us make our good decisions a bit more decisively (with appropriate confidence, as opposed to overconfidence). They also want to make us better advisers to our colleagues and loved ones who are making decisions, because it's usually easier to see other people's biases than our own. These are some goals well worth meeting and they've done a great job of providing tools for doing just that.

So here is how they lay it out for us:

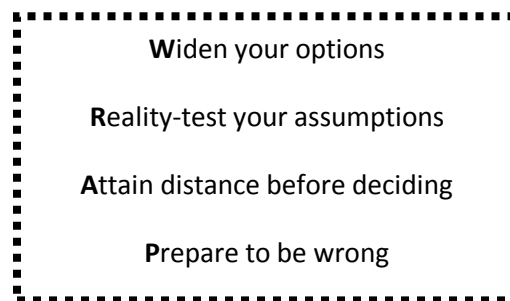
"If you think about a normal decision process, it usually proceeds in four steps:

- You encounter a choice.
- You analyze your options.
- You make a choice.
- Then you live with it.

And what we've seen is that there is a villain that afflicts each of these stages:

- You encounter a choice. **But narrow framing makes you miss options.**
- You analyze your options. **But the confirmation bias leads you to gather self-serving information.**
- You make a choice. **But short-term emotion will often tempt you to make the wrong one.**
- Then you live with it. **But you'll often be overconfident about how the future will unfold."**

The four-step decision making process is outlined next and explained with great information, examples, and stories. I highly recommend reading the book but in the interest of speeding us on our way to better decision making, here's the WRAP process.



Perhaps the WRAP process can help us avoid the dismal outcomes reported in the business research on decision making. For example, one study showed that 83% of corporate mergers and acquisitions failed to create any value for shareholders and another study of 20,000 executive searches found that within 18 months, 40% of senior-level hires had been pushed out, failed or quit, and that 60% of 2,207 executives reported to researchers that bad decisions were about as frequent as good ones. Even

though we're pretty well wired to act foolishly, ignoring the executive parts of our brains, and trusting our unreliable guts, we can still reduce our propensity for poor decision making.

You might consider this decision making advice from the book, **Yes, You Can**, by Sam Deep and Lyle Sussman (1996)

- Recognize that you will never have perfect information for making important decisions. Set the goal of making *good* decisions with *sufficient* information within a *limited* time.
- Define the problem to be solved. What exactly is the gap between where you are and where you want to be?
- List as many options as you can to close this gap. Be creative; ask others for suggestions. Don't jump on the first good-looking alternative, and don't stop until you run out of ideas.
- Determine the criteria your final decision will satisfy. What "musts" will you insist upon, what "wants" will you hope for, and what is their relative importance?
- Apply your criteria to all the options. Then select the one that meets all the must conditions and does the best job of achieving your most important wants.
- Before you implement your decision, ask yourself what might go wrong with it. Prepare yourself to solve possible glitches down the road.
- Get feedback. Can others find the flaws in your thinking that could keep you from getting to where you want to be?
- Act on your decision. Don't second-guess yourself, but if new information comes to light, be flexible and revise the decision.
- When you're paralyzed, own up to the cause. Is it perfectionism, insecurity, aversion to risk, fear of failure, or hoping to be all things to all people?

In **The Book of Secrets, Unlocking the Hidden Dimensions of Your Life** by Deepak Chopra you'll find this:

"If you obsess over whether you are making the right decision, you are basically assuming that the universe will reward you for one thing and punish you for another.

The universe has no fixed agenda. Once you make any decision, it works around that decision. There is no right or wrong, only a series of possibilities that shift with each thought, feeling, and action that you experience.

If this sounds too mystical, refer again to the body. Every significant vital sign- body temperature, heart rate, oxygen consumption, hormone level, brain activity, and so on- alters the moment you decide to do anything... decisions are signals telling your body, mind, and environment to move in a certain direction."

One final word of advice on decision making from **Napoleon Bonaparte** and you will have all the tools you need. **"Take time to deliberate, but when the time for action has arrived, stop thinking and go in."**

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## **About Karen McGee**

Karen McGee, Chief Development Officer and Principal of Strategic Development Initiatives, LLC, is a graduate of the Newfield Network Certified Coach Training Program. Karen is passionate about establishing a culture of individual and team leadership in a trust based environment so each member of the team is thriving, fully engaged, and working collaboratively with others to achieve individual and organizational goals that far exceed expectations. She is skilled in leadership and personnel development, performance management, conflict resolution, training and facilitation as well as a broad array of communication skills.

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