

## ***Making Effective Leadership Decisions***

How much time each week do you spend making decisions? Many of the choices a leader makes are almost automatic, requiring little thought. However, there are definitely more challenging choices that must be made.

Daily work life is made up of numerous tasks, all of which require decision-making. According to Sheena Iyengar, a Professor at Columbia Business School and author of “The Art of Choosing,” the average CEO works on 139 tasks per week. Iyengar also reports that researchers who documented the decisions related to those 139 tasks found that half the choices related to task completion took nine minutes or less. Not all decisions were reached quickly, as approximately 12% of CEO decisions required an hour or more of thought.

When it comes to effective leadership decision-making, it’s both a quantity and quality issue. As a leader, the ability to make sound decisions is critical; knowing just how much time to invest in a decision can make or break your personal effectiveness and, by extension, that of your team. Obviously, certain decisions require careful thought. But you’re probably over-thinking other issues that don’t require the attention you’re devoting.

Jennifer Miller is a leadership development consultant whose recent post in SmartBlog on Leadership listed five reasons you might be investing too much time in deciding.

**Your threshold for accuracy is too high.** If you are a high achiever (as most leaders are), it’s likely that high accuracy is part of your DNA. If nearly perfect is your default operating mode, rethink your quality threshold. For decisions with low probability of negative ramifications, ask yourself what is good enough? Even if the choice doesn’t meet your standards, does it meet the standards of the person making the request? If it does, let it go.

**There are too many choices.** If you have a tendency to be very thorough in your thought process, it’s possible you are inadvertently decreasing the quality of your decision. Iyengar’s research has shown that having too many choices actually leads to poorer decision quality. Have you asked your staff to bring you numerous options in the name of thoroughness? Stick to between five and seven options for optimal decision-making.

**You’re going for the “instant” option.** Sometimes the best choice requires a bit of willpower. For example, you say “yes” to your customer (satisfying the customer is a key priority, right?) and agree to provide a quote for services by day’s end today, even though you know that it would be a more accurate—and therefore more profitable quote if your team had another day to work on it. But humans are notoriously bad at making choices based on outcomes that are future-based. What decisions are you making that are appealing for the near term, but would be even better if you exercised a bit of additional willpower?

**The perceived risk is exaggerated.** Although some of a leader’s decisions truly have important financial and people-related implications, many more fall into less weighty categories. Often, the choices that cause leaders to hesitate have far more to do with ego and reputation than any true harm to one’s team or organization. What do you (or your organization) really have to lose by making this choice? Remember that even failure can be an opportunity to learn something, so if that’s what’s holding you back, reconsider.

**You have a “do-it-myself” mindset.** The buck does eventually stop with you and there are times when you must make tough choices. Even so, how often do you pull the decisions towards you when one of your team members could easily make the call? The greatest gift you can give as a leader is to develop the decision-making skills of your team members.

Are you cultivating the right balance of deep thought and expedient decision-making? The next time you have a decision to make, Miller suggests using these five guidelines to determine if the choice is worthy of an hour of your time, or less than 10 minutes. Then, start deciding.