

# Choice and Challenges

## Unleash the Power of Determined Decision Making

BY LUDA KOPEIKINA

The quality of your decisions profoundly affects the quality of your life and work. What can you learn from effective decision makers to improve your skills when you must make difficult choices?

When faced with a complex decision that has significant consequences, everyone has a distinctive decision-making style, whether he or she is conscious of it or not. Knowing how to reach clarity on a decision quickly, especially in critical times, is the mark of an accomplished leader.

Experts often cite five common decision-making challenges.

- Lack of a clear objective
- Lack of clear constraints
- Difficulties in dealing with emotions (such as fear, guilt and regret, or emotions resulting from a disagreement)
- Failure to develop a clear perspective
- Difficulty in selecting among options

Sound familiar? Master decision makers know how to overcome these hurdles and seem to make clear, effective decisions effortlessly. The key to masterful decision making is the ability to focus all of your physical, mental and emotional resources squarely on an issue. It is a skill and it can be learned.

No matter what your decision-making style, you can make better and more consistent choices with better outcomes. Learning these skills will, in turn, enable clear communication and allow you to lead with passion and conviction.

To master the skill of effective decision making, you'll need to know yourself, cultivate self-discipline and continuously scrutinize and improve your decisions. It's not an easy process, but with work, you can eliminate confusion and substantially increase your clarity. To begin making decisions with clarity faster and easier, follow these steps.

**1. Know where you stand.** Begin with simple record-keeping by listing all of the difficult decisions you can recall. Consider what made the situation tough and what method, if any, you used to reach a solution. Once you've amassed this information, you should be able to see patterns and will gain critical information about how you learned to make decisions in your early years and what decision-making habits you've developed over time.

**2. Welcome introspection.** All great leaders are willing to look inward and ask themselves difficult questions. You, too, must be comfortable with this process to become a masterful decision maker. Analyze your decision-making record once you've created it and identify common



The key to masterful decision making is the ability to focus all of your physical, mental and emotional resources squarely on an issue. It is a skill and it can be learned.

difficulties you've encountered when making decisions. For example, do you see a pattern of finally deciding only when you're under tremendous pressure, choosing whatever seems likely to cause the least pain just when you believe time is about to run out? Or do you see yourself repeatedly seeing too many facets of the problem or possible solutions, unable to discern which would be best and just randomly choosing?

Questions will naturally arise about your position on certain issues and how your personal goals either work with or conflict with organizational goals. Ask yourself:

- What am I doing well?
- What patterns can I see in the various issues I have encountered in my career and in my life?
- What barriers have I created that stand in the way of my success?

**3. Leverage the "Clarity State."** Set the stage for new insights, ideas and unexpected breakthroughs by learning to use the Clarity State. In such a state, you are physically relaxed, emotionally positive, released from fear and anxiety, charged with power and self-confidence, totally in the present and mentally focused on the task at hand.

While improvements to your decision-making style are possible *without* using it, you'll find that this very powerful and enjoyable state of mind, commonly used by athletes to achieve peak performance, will make it easier and faster to identify and improve your decision-making issues. The Clarity State is similar to a meditative state, in which the mind is cleared of stress, anxiety, racing thoughts and "noise" that often obscure reflection and insight, and intuition is allowed to come to the fore. Based on research in the fields of neuroscience and psychology, the Clarity State is particular to each individual and offers increased peace of mind and improved speed and quality of decision making.

**4. Develop mind discipline and focus.** Contemplating a decision is quite different process from a typical thought process. It requires greater focus and mind control so you can maintain a coherent state of mind, body and emotions while considering a decision. To be most effective, you need to achieve balance between regular rational thinking and intuition, and then shift the intuitive into the foreground while backgrounding the rational. This mental flexibility will keep you from resorting to old habits of response and will help to screen out unrelated thoughts as they crop up.

Instead, new and interesting thoughts and ideas will enter your conscious awareness.

Studies have shown that CEOs of larger organizations generally have great mind discipline and control; this ability is developed with experience and correlates directly to the level of achievement in one's career. Ultimately, the payoffs for learning the mental discipline required to maintain the Clarity State while contemplating a decision are the insights, ideas and breakthroughs that lead to higher career achievement.

**5. Adopt best practices.** Once you've identified and enhanced your own decision-making style, it's beneficial to look at those decision makers you consider effective and emulate them. What can you learn from how others achieve clarity to make decisions that you could incorporate into your own method?

The improvement you decide to incorporate into your style may be small, but with it, your leap to decision-making mastery can be large. For example, you might learn to define your decisions better. The mere awareness of critical decision parameters will bring depth to the overall process.

As effective decision makers know, however, the most powerful recipe for improvement is the combination of being in the Clarity State supported by the discipline of defining decisions and clear methods of overcoming decision-making difficulties. This combination enables deep insights and breakthrough ideas to surface. With practice, you can unleash this innate power of insight on any issue, problem or forward-looking strategy.

## FACING THE CHALLENGES

Ultimately, you must learn to embrace the challenges inherent in decision making. If you can consider the decision-making process a game instead of a wall you must constantly beat your head against, you will find yourself having fun, and consequently invent more and more powerful methods that work for you. ✨

### *about the author*

**Luda Kopeikina** is CEO of Noventra Corp., an innovation commercialization firm, and author of the Prentice Hall book, *The Right Decision Every Time: How to Reach Perfect Clarity on Tough Decisions*. For more information on her book and her speaking and consulting work, visit [www.ludakopeikina.com](http://www.ludakopeikina.com).