



Making the right call

When trying to make effective decisions we should learn the lessons of the greats and acknowledge the benefits of a good night's sleep, says David Parmenter

We can't always make the right decision, all the time. In fact, sometimes making the wrong decision is better than being paralysed by the options and not making a decision at all. If you realise it was wrong quickly, you can always abandon the decision and proceed down a different route.

The ability to make decisions and take calculated risks is a trait within our DNA. Jack Welch, former CEO of General Electric, makes it clear in his book *Winning* that leaders need to be able to make the unpopular decisions and the hard calls where not all the information is at hand, by relying on their gut instinct. They should realise that they have been appointed to the position because of their experience and their previous history of making more right decisions than wrong ones.

When looking at a decision, it is useful to learn from the great decision-makers of the past. Welch suggests that the decision-maker needs to have 'curiosity that borders on scepticism'.

Leaders need to be constantly aware of risks and discuss the likely consequences with their management team. Lord Nelson, the great British naval chief of the Battle of Trafalgar, is an excellent example of a leader who would consider possible outcomes with his naval comrades, discussing tactics endlessly over evening meals. His aim was that, during the heat of the battle, all the captains would know what would be the best course of action for the fleet. They would act as one, a 'band of brothers'. In fact, during his last famous battle, he issued just one order: 'England



expects that every man will do his duty.'

Jim Collins, author of *Good to Great*, says that you need to know if the decision, if it goes against you, will affect you 'above or below the waterline'. The below-the-waterline risk will obviously sink the organisation unless quick action is taken to mitigate the carnage.

Peter Drucker, the father of management theory, observed that weak leaders make plenty of easy decisions while strong leaders make fewer – but bigger – ones. He went on to say that outstanding performers have no fear of failure.

For any difficult decisions, it is a good idea to 'FRAME' them:

- * **Financial:** ensure that you can afford any potential downside.
- * **Research:** look back on your own experiences or learn from people you know who have made the same decision in the past. History has a habit of repeating itself.

- * **Avoid looking back after the decision:** just move on and modify your course as and when needed, just as an ocean liner modifies its course during its voyage. It is important to make sure you don't end up becoming an 'I should have...' person.
- * **Mentor:** always discuss major decisions with your mentor. Only the foolish venture forth without having a mentor supporting them from behind the scenes (see 'Mind the mentor', June 2017, page 48.)
- * **Evaluate:** bring out that old favourite, the two-column pros and cons schedule, and study the decision with your mentor.

Arianna Huffington, founder of *The Huffington Post*, and her team are heading a sleep revolution. They point to compelling evidence that when deprived of sleep, we're significantly more likely to make bad decisions and exercise poor judgment – which could easily end up costing more energy to correct.

A 2015 Washington State University study demonstrated that when participants were deprived of sleep their brains were simply unable to process feedback from their actions and the changing circumstances. A good night's sleep of eight hours could make all the difference to your judgment. ^{AB}

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More information

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