

Stuck in Indecision?

5 tips for confident decision-making

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Do you ever feel stuck in the land of "I don't know what to do?" If you are a leader, you might feel this is exactly where you live. Every day is full of decisions—some big, some small—but they all have to be made. Making decisions with confidence can be a struggle for many of us. Consider these statistics:

- Women spend 30 percent more time than men questioning their own decisions.
- Women identify lack of confidence in decision making as the number one contributor to leadership insecurity.
- Women invest 37 percent more time than men do in second-guessing themselves after the decision is made.

Follow the formula

So how can you get better at making decisions? In our book, *Just Lead!*, Jenni Catron and I tackle how to develop confidence in decision-making. Some of the decisions you face are easy and can be made quickly, but for those weightier ones, here's a formula Jenni and I both use:

1. Identify the problem.

Before I joined MOPS International, I had the privilege of working for Leadership Network, an organization based in Dallas that helps church leaders develop their leadership skills by identifying areas of growth and potential in their ministry and in themselves. In researching innovation (which involves making decisions about which ideas to pursue), it was clear that a huge roadblock to innovation and problem solving is that many times we are focusing on the wrong problem. In other words, what we think is the problem is not really the problem.

Consider a particular issue that needs a decision. Is it possible you've muddied the core issue with other things that don't need to be fixed or solved? (For example, have you assumed the cost of an event is the barrier for attendance when really it is the date?) Or are your emotions getting in the way of clarifying what the problem really is? (For example, are you invested in an idea that just won't work, but no one wants to admit it?) If you can't clearly identify the problem in one sentence, you're not ready to solve it yet. This means you need some more thinking time. It might also be helpful to get clarity on what the issue really is by talking it out with someone who is not directly involved.

2. Investigate it.

This step can really eat up your time, but it saves you from getting into trouble later. Do you know the history of the situation? Have you investigated what has already been tried and why it failed? Ask. Talk it out. Look at the situation from all angles and try to picture the results of each option.

I have to admit, this is the step where I'm tempted to skim, thinking, *Yeah, yeah, I got it. Let's go!* An interesting thing about leaders with type-A personalities is that they often tend to take this attitude. They lead with more confidence (or arrogance) than knowledge and impatiently make a decision based on intuition rather than real knowledge. If you are this type of leader, it's worth it to discern what you think versus what you really know. Do you have research to back up your opinion? Do you really understand all the parts of the problem or its possible solutions? I hate wasting time or delaying a decision, but the reality is, people who are committed to learning and take the time to do so make better decisions.

3. Seek input.

Get off the leadership island. Surround yourself with smart people who make wise decisions themselves and invite them into the decision-making process. I recently heard a leader say, "If you are the smartest person in the room, then you need a new room." Do you have sharp people to go to when you face a tough decision? Ask them what they would do and then listen.

4. Pray seriously.

We all know prayer helps, but how often do we throw up a quick, last-minute prayer instead of really taking the time to ask God: *What do you think I should do?* Time is our friend here. Give your heart a chance to listen to what God is saying. I'm amazed at myself when I look back at a decision and realize I skimmed over this step. There have been times when I already had my mind made up and then I asked God for his approval rather than his guidance. Big mistake.

5. Make the decision expeditiously.

Once you know what to do, *do it*. Hesitating or procrastinating because you're afraid only makes it harder and sends you into "analysis paralysis" and second-guessing. If you've spent time on the steps above and you have clarity, now is the time for confidence and action.

Avoid roadblocks

Sometimes even after I move through these steps, I still feel stuck. This is when I have to stop and check to see if I've slid into one or more of the bad decision-making habits below. As you read through these roadblocks to good decision making, ask yourself if any of these have slipped into your thinking or habits.

Don't depend on someone else to do the research (or make the decision) for you.

Leaning into others for help in investigating a problem and possible solutions is always a good thing, but if you're the one who has to make the final decision, you need to be involved in the learning. It's tempting to rely on others to tell you what to do, but that's lazy leadership and it will leave you feeling less confident. So invest in the research and learning, or if someone else on your team is taking the lead here, make sure they bring you along.

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Don't get lost in the weeds.

Evaluating too many options can be paralyzing and keep you from making a decision. Identifying three or four really good options is sometimes better than identifying *every* possible option.

Don't second-guess yourself to death.

Once the decision is made, it's time for confidence. When I start questioning whether I've chosen the right course, it helps to remind myself of the benefits of the decision and the research and learning behind it. It doesn't help to waste time on the "what if" or "I should have" scenerios. Expecting perfection can be a decision-killer. Instead, lead confidently with your best option.

Next time you're stuck in the murky land of "I don't know what to do," choose to step out of indecision and instead move forward on a clearly defined path. You can take confidence as you follow these steps (and avoid these roadblocks) in order to lead courageously and decisively.



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