



‘Simon Says’

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Did you know...

Using a simple decision-making experiment neuroscientists monitoring brain activity have identified that people have often decided on a course of action 10 seconds before they are consciously aware of having made any decision at all? The brain busily prepares for a pending decision well before it enters awareness¹.

Can you teach common sense? Perhaps not...but better decision making – absolutely!

Is good decision making a process or an art? As business managers we are not always going to make the right decisions but when the buck stops with you there is a lot of pressure to get it right most of the time. The quality of your business decisions can be influenced by any number of factors including level of urgency, environment, available resources, priority, risk and desired outcome.



We are typically presented with a steady stream of problem/solution scenarios every day. Low risk decisions tend to be based on readily available information and have highly predictable outcomes. More often at a senior level however, we are thrown a curve ball. It may be driven by a trend of disappointing sales figures, changes to terms of trade, a loss of a big contract or an acquisition opportunity. At this point the risk/opportunity ratio is high. The good news is that while making good decisions is not an exact science, the likelihood of success is greatly increased by fairly straight forward metrics.

One of my favourite consulting leaders is Clients for Life author Andrew Sobel. He suggests that to make better decisions in our business we need to:

- 1. Clearly define the problem and don't accept it at face value.** It is important to look past the obvious 'flaws' in a project and understand the driving issue behind it. What is really causing the problem? Is it the project itself or perhaps an issue with management, resourcing or skills?
- 2. Embark on a fact finding strategy.** Draw on your team to collect the information you need to make an informed decision. This may include data, historical evidence, reports, corporate and industry knowledge and brainstorming.
- 3. Be selective in who you involve to create the solution.** Too many diverse opinions and too much information can be difficult to manage and you don't want to lose sight of the main issue.
- 4. Challenge previous outcomes.** Applying lessons learned is so critical to great decision making. Question why things turned out the way they did and ask how things may have turned out differently with a different strategy.

- 5. Listen to what your inner voice is telling you.** Intuition is a powerful thing and is not to be confused with clouded judgement or bias. If we remain open during the fact gathering stage our own personal experience and perspective contributes an invaluable human element to support a holistic decision making process.

Senior business managers are rarely afforded the luxury of a generous timeframe to make important decisions. In contextualising our problem we should gladly take full advantage of the available time we have to explore and test our decision making techniques. This allows us to:

- **Assess the level of priority and potential risk.** Does the problem align with current business priorities? Is there a potential impact if the decision is delayed and what opportunity/risk ratio is your organisation happy to take on?
- **Reframe the problem from different perspectives.** Are there additional factors that should be considered? It is helpful to ask questions that test and potentially disprove your original hypothesis.
- **Engage in prospective hindsight.** This is simply presenting potential solutions as a reality and working progressively backwards through each scenario to discover the logistics of how and why it will or will not work.
- **Improve the quality and creativity of your think-tank.** Initiating a free flowing brainstorming session and encouraging your trusted team to canvas conventional and not so conventional scenarios is well worth the effort. Outlandish suggestions often lead to brilliant solutions.

Finally, we have to accept that we are human. We will do our very best with the quality information and decision making support tools we have available to us and hopefully get it right 95% of the time. Once the decision is made, commit to it, document it and get on with it.

Edward George provides comprehensive Human Resource Solutions specialising in recruitment and retention strategies, exit interviews, position description upgrades and outplacement services. If you would like further information about any of our services, email us at perth@edwardgeorge.com.au or phone us on **9457 4566**.

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¹<http://www.nature.com/neuro/journal/v11/n5/abs/nn.2112.html>