

## How to Make Better Decisions Faster

By Ann Latham

Painful, time-consuming and ineffective might be among the words that come to mind when you think about past, or current, decisions. Whether big or little, important or trivial, unilateral or group efforts, decision making can be really hard.

Couple this with the fact that we make an enormous number of decisions daily, and it is a wonder we are rarely taught a good decision making process.

So now is your chance. Spend a few minutes learning the process below and then practice daily. The result will be better and faster decisions.

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The problem is, most people skip two of them."***

There are only three steps in making a decision. The problem is, most people skip two of them. Before we discuss the three steps of decision making, take a minute to clearly state the decision you wish to make. This might be harder than you think and may be the first step to better and faster decisions.

For example, have you ever discussed buying a new car? You express interest in a particular model, your spouse mentions cargo space, and your kids want red. Someone suggests mileage is important and then the conversation shifts to the trade-in value and condition of your current cars. What decision are you making? Are you trying to decide what kind of car to buy, whether to buy a car, which car to replace, or the particular model, color and features? These are all different decisions that must be answered in a logical order. By stating the decision at hand, you clarify for yourself, and anyone else, exactly where you are and what decision needs to be made next. This is a critical precursor to making a decision.

### 1. Determine Objectives

Step one in making a decision is to determine the objectives.

- What are you trying to accomplish?
- What criteria are important?
- What are your priorities?
- What are the limitations?

Let's return to the example of the car purchase. Suppose the decision is to select a car that will be used primarily for commuting alone over a considerable distance. The important criteria are likely to include mileage, price, safety and driver comfort. Less important criteria may be the type of sound system, GPS and the color red.

The objectives can, and often should, be ranked in order of importance so that you can be sure the choice you make satisfies the most important objectives. In addition to ranking objectives, you should separate your "musts" from your "wants." A "must" represents a go/no-go criteria. In the case of the car purchase, a "must" might be that the price does not exceed your budget. You would be foolish to sacrifice a "must" like your budget in favor of a "want" such as a particular sound system. You shouldn't even be looking at cars that fail to pass a go/no-go test such as budget.

Don't make the common mistake of skipping this step. Clarify your objectives before continuing to the second step of decision making.

## 2. Identify Alternatives

The second step in decision making is to identify the alternatives. This is the step that no one skips. However, this step is often short-changed. There are usually more alternatives than you first realize.


The alternatives must be measured against the objectives determined in step #1. Any that fail to measure up to a "must" should be tossed out. The remainder can be assessed, even scored if desired, to determine the best choice or choices.

Be careful here; we are not finished. An exciting alternative often causes people to grab it and run, thus skipping the third step of decision making.

## 3. Consider Risks

Once you have identified one or more top alternatives, you must consider the risks involved with each. Can you live with those risks? If not, figure out a way to reduce the risk, or toss out that alternative and move on to another. This step is also skipped more often than not. Many bad choices could have been avoided simply by pausing long enough to ask what might go wrong.

For example, suppose the apparently perfect car is a new model with a new type of engine, lots of new technology, and no track record for quality. Other than that, it is simply awesome. Is that enough to give you cold feet?



Don't skip steps and suffer the consequences. Objectives, alternatives, risks. In that order. Every time you make a decision. Start practicing today. You will be surprised at how much more easily and quickly you arrive at noticeably better and more comfortable decisions.

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