



# Steps to Making Excellent Decisions

Help! I Need to Make a Decision!

Many people who come to my office admit they have a difficult time making decisions. Making decisions is a skill that can be mastered by anyone. I recommend that people follow these four steps:

1. **Identify the real issue.** For example, you are trying to decide which movie to see with your spouse, but you are having a hard time agreeing. As you talk about it, you realize that the real issue is that you simply want some time to be together in a quiet place where you can talk. Going to a movie does not address this issue.
2. **Identify the available options.** In the above example, the options might include going to a quiet restaurant, taking a drive, or walking on the beach.
3. **Evaluate the available options.** Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of each option. Evaluate how well each option addresses the real issue.
4. **Implement the decision.** Make a choice and carry it out.

Even though most people make dozens of important and complex judgments every day, few of us have actually been trained to make good decisions.

We started making basic decisions when we were young children, and we continue to follow the same simple process as we get older, even though the issues have become much more complicated.



We learned to make decisions by watching our parents and learning in school. Mostly we learned by trial and error.

Our first decisions were pretty simple—to choose pizza or hamburgers, to play softball or soccer, to wear the pink headband or the blue one. These decisions pretty much boiled down to choosing between X and Y.

According to the authors of Smart Choices: A Practical Guide to Making Better Decisions, most of us continue to choose between X and Y without making certain that we are addressing the real problem in the first place.

A second common mistake is rushing into a decision, hurrying to get it over with. We rarely step back from the decision and view it in a broader context.

While it is more difficult and time-consuming, it is better to take your time and be sure you are seeing the big picture and the key issues.

## STRATEGIES FOR MAKING BETTER DECISIONS

1. **Take your time making important decisions.** Some situations require a deliberate and careful decision-making process.
2. **Once the decision has been made, carry it out without hesitation.**
3. **If you can, delegate decisions to those who will carry them out.** Try to be on the lookout for ways to push the decision-making process down a level. For example, if you are making decisions for your family, consider how you can involve your kids in the process.

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Director of **The Marriage Clinic**

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4. **Making decisions requires both intuition and logic.** It's important to trust your gut, but be sure you are thinking logically.
5. Unless the situation is pretty straightforward, it is a good idea to **generate as many ideas as you can.** Learn the principles of brainstorming to get as many options as possible.
6. **Look at the issues from different points of view.** How do they look to the different groups they might affect? For example, if a teacher asks his students to wear purple shirts tomorrow, will the kids' parents have the time to help them prepare on such short notice?
7. **Consider the immediate and long-term implications of each solution, including its impact on other people.**
8. **Consider the worst- and best-case scenarios, as well as the possibilities in between.**

#### DECIDING YOURSELF VS. INVOLVING OTHERS

Involving others in your decision-making process helps you avoid the tendency to rush into a decision, hurrying to get it over with. When you take the time to consult others, you force yourself to step back from the situation and see it in a broader context. While it is more difficult and time-consuming, getting the advice and support of others can help you produce better decisions.

##### Consider these points when seeking advice:

1. Determine whom to involve in the process. If it's a simple, low-risk decision, you may not need to involve anyone else.
2. If you ask others for advice and suggestions, be prepared to respond to their input.
3. Determine who will need to approve your decision and get that approval.

##### Consider these points when seeking support:

1. Think about who might resist your decision, and have a plan to manage that resistance.
2. Identify ways to increase the chances that your decision will be supported.

3. If your decision presents any risks, look for ways to minimize them.

#### RULES OF BRAINSTORMING

1. Write down the question you are addressing. For example, *"Where shall we go on vacation?"*
2. Think of as many ideas as you can.
3. Write down every idea, no matter how wild it seems.
4. No one is allowed to judge or evaluate any of the ideas in any way. This includes making faces, rolling eyes, and sighing.
5. The goal is to think of as many ideas as you can. Quantity is more important than quality.
6. After everyone is finished suggesting ideas, take a break.
7. After the break, discuss the ideas and edit the list. A solution will emerge.

Identify a situation in your life right now. Be sure to choose something important and challenging. Apply the steps we have been exploring to this situation.

1. Describe the situation.
2. What is the real issue here?
3. List the pros and cons of each option.
4. What do you need to consider when seeking advice?
5. What do you need to consider when seeking support?
6. What are the best options?
7. Who needs to be involved?
8. What should be delegated? To whom?
9. What resources would need to be secured?
10. What steps need to be planned, and what is their timing?



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**Dr. Jonathan Isaacson** is a licensed clinical psychologist, specializing in pre-marital and marriage counseling. He also specializes in helping singles choose healthy partners and loving relationships. With proven and timeless principles and strategies, you can create a loving marriage that will last a lifetime. Dr. Isaacson guides his clients to resolve couples distress and overcome challenges. He offers programs on marriage/relationship enhancement that includes a couple's personality and relationship profiles. Dr. Isaacson helps individuals overcome psychological and emotional problems which only become exacerbated in a relationship. He is the Director of **The Marriage Clinic** in Beachwood, Ohio and can be reached at **216-292-4500**.