

HOW TO MAKE GOOD DECISIONS

Making good decisions has a major part in shaping our lives. “Big” decisions are especially important to us. These include choices concerning career, housing, transportation, services, technology, and even recreation, including vacations. These are areas we consciously are concerned about making the “right” decision. We may worry and ponder, but too often the big decisions are based largely on emotion and gut feeling.

Making good decisions can be remarkably simple. There are three keys:

- Understanding what the real decision is.
- Clear criteria to evaluate choices.
- Thorough understanding of alternatives available.

The INSTRUCTIONS explain a decision-making process that brings these three keys together in a clear, concise way. A WORKSHEET and scoring system provide a comprehensive overview that will enable you to evaluate information objectively and make an informed decision.

There is no system that will guarantee that you make the “right” decision. However, this is a practical process that will increase the probability that you make good decisions. But you need to make the process work. Give it your full attention. Concentrate on what’s important. Be thorough in studying the alternatives. Be honest and objective. This is a very small price that can pay off in good decisions that can impact your life.

DECISION WORKSHEET INSTRUCTIONS

1. Decision Statement
 - Determine the basic decision to be made. This is a vital first step. Too often we are impatient and fail to develop a clear understanding of what we really want to decide.
 - Recognize any decisions already made that will affect what we are deciding.
 - Write your decision statement at the top of the worksheet (fig. #1). Refer to this statement often to keep your decision process on course.

2. Determine Mandatory Requirements-- “the MUSTS”
 - Identify the requirements that any decision alternatives must meet to be considered. These are the mandatory criteria that you will use in the decision process. Restrict these criteria to the most important criteria. There should be only a few of these “MUSTS”.
 - List your mandatory requirements in the box in the top left of the work sheet (fig. #2). Make these statements brief but very clear.
 - Any alternative or choice which does not meet these especially important criteria should be dropped from consideration.

- 2b. Identify Other Criteria
 - Identify other criteria, in addition to your mandatory requirements, that are important in reaching your decision. You may want to brainstorm to get a full range of considerations.
 - Unite your criteria so they reflect the results you want.
 - Don’t write these on your worksheet. Use a writing tablet or scratch pad. There is more preparation work to do.

3. Review and then List Criteria
 - Carefully review all the requirements that you have written. Then combine and/or separate them as seems appropriate. Add criteria you may have left out.
 - Now, write each criterion in the left column of the work sheet (fig. #3). Be sure to state your criteria in brief but clear form.

4. Establish Importance of Requirements
 - Decide how important each requirement, or criterion, is relative to others you have listed.
 - Indicate this relative importance by assigning a weight, or value, to each criterion. Use a scale of 1 to 10 with 10 being the most important.
 - Review the weights you assigned. Giving every requirement a value of 9 or 10 is counter-productive. Remember, the weight figure is the way that you show the relative degree of importance of the various requirements one to another.
 - Write the weight in the column labeled “Wt” immediately to the right of the criterion (fig. #4).

5. List Decision Choices/Alternatives
 - Write the obvious options, or choices, for making your decision on a separate sheet of paper.
 - Next, brainstorm other alternatives to consider.
 - Now, write all your potential choices on another sheet of paper. Review all of the alternatives. Decide on the alternatives to evaluate for your decision.

List Decision Choices/Alternatives (Cont'd.)

- Write the alternatives across the top of the worksheet in the boxes at the top of the vertical columns (fig. #5).
 - Begin to gather information about each alternative.
6. Evaluate the Alternatives Against the Requirement Criteria
- First, check your decision alternatives against the list of mandatory requirements. Remember, any alternative must meet these special criteria to be considered further. Write “OK” at the bottom of the column for alternatives that meet the mandatory requirements. Those that don’t, write “NO” and add a cryptic note why the alternative failed (fig. #6).
 - Now, evaluate each decision alternative still in consideration against each of the listed criterion.
7. Assign a Value
- Assign a value, or weight, to indicate how well each alternative meets the requirements of the criteria. Use a numeric scale of 1 to 10 with 10 indicated the highest or best score. Write these numbers in their vertical columns titled “VI” for each alternative (fig. #7).
8. Compare Alternatives to requirements
- As each criterion is judged, add brief notes about the alternative relative to that particular requirement (fig. # 8).
9. Compute the Scores
- For each requirement, work across the sheet and MULTIPLY (X) the weight of the criterion by your evaluation of the value, or weight, of the alternative in meeting the requirement. Write this figure in the vertical column titled “Sc” for each alternative (fig.9).
 - Do this multiplication for each criterion and every alternative until every decision option has a score. Double check your multiplication. It’s simple math but inattention can result in errors that impact the decision process.
10. Total the Scores
- Add the scores for each alternative in the vertical column from top to bottom. Double check your addition.
 - Write the total number at the bottom of the column under each alternative (fig. #10).

Making the Decision

- The higher the total score, the better the choice. Using the total scores, you can rank the decision alternatives.
- Your decision is not bound by these scores. You may wish to choose an alternative with a lower score. However, if you do this, you should check your criteria and evaluation scores again. Be sure you were honest and objective with the weights that you assigned. Pause to determine what is moving you toward a lower scoring alternative. Sometimes it’s a gut feeling. That’s OK if you recognize it. But also realize that you may be making a decision based on emotion, or what you feel you want to do while disregarding objective criteria.