

Navigating Life's Choices: Decisions, Decisions, Decisions

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Decision making in action

Each day we are faced with many decisions. Most are small and mundane and happen instantaneously with little apparent thought, such as, “What should I wear today?” “What’s for dinner?” or “What television program should I watch?” But it’s not the plethora of daily split-second decisions that challenge us or cause us angst. It’s the tough decisions, where the consequences are greater, that the process of evaluating and ultimately making a decision is much harder.

Decision making: Values and behaviors as the foundation

When it comes to grappling with major decisions, one’s value system becomes the foundation for the process. What values are most important in defining who you are? For example, your critical values may include such things as loyalty, trust, friendship, family, integrity, fun, security, spirituality, health, or stability. The possibilities can go on and on. It’s also important to realize that prioritization of your values may shift, depending upon the life situation or community (i.e., personal vs. work vs. volunteerism) you

are involved with at the time. Additionally, your values affect your behavior and communication style, which, in turn, influence the way you perceive the world—people, problems, opportunities. Take a moment to think about your personality and communication style, as well as those of your friends, co-workers, and other key people in your life. This awareness will allow you to understand the impact you have on others, and enable you to effectively adapt your approach as you interact with different behavior styles.

Decision making as a process

Decision making should be considered a process. This process follows eight steps. Once you feel comfortable in working through the steps, a good, thoughtful decision is always within your grasp. Our beloved Mary Love Collins (S.H. 1910–52) said, “Intelligence guides the choice of the ways.” Certainly a process that helps bring structure in making important life decisions is in keeping with her words of wisdom.

1. Getting Started. Acknowledging the need to act is frequently the greatest obstacle. It is also important to realize that not every decision facing you demands your attention. It’s not up to you to fix every situation or problem. Some decisions can be delayed or avoided altogether.

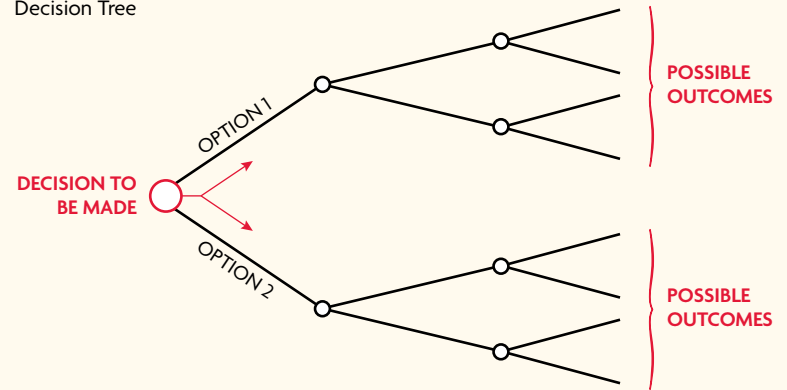
2. Identify Stakeholders. Who else is impacted by this decision? The more important the decision, the more important it is to consider your values. Recognize and appreciate the different behavior styles in discussing the decision with stakeholders.



Decision-making process

1. Getting Started
2. Identifying Stakeholders
3. Gather and Consult
4. Consider Options
5. Acknowledge Consequences
6. Make the Decision
7. Communicate and Implement
8. Evaluate the Decision

Decision Tree



3. Gather and Consult. Get the facts in order FIRST. The appropriate background information is essential to making an educated decision. It may also be helpful to solicit the advice and input of a trusted friend, family member, or colleague who may have a different perspective (e.g., different behavioral style) that can help you think about the situation from a different vantage point.

4. Consider Options. Brainstorm decision options and possible outcomes for each. Take time to evaluate the “what ifs” of each option. A decision tree can be a useful tool in working through each possible option. This visual tool also helps keep you focused and organized in the evaluation process.

5. Acknowledge Consequences. Revisit the decision tree to make sure you understand the implications of decision options. Also take time to reflect on your experiences and apply any lessons learned that may be helpful and relevant.

6. Make the Decision. The second toughest part of the process after getting started is reaching a firm decision. Consider your values, experiences and knowledge. Do not underestimate your intuition and wisdom in making your final decision. Be courageous in committing to the right decision.

7. Communicate and Implement. Congratulations! You’ve made the decision. Now OWN the decision. You’ve been thorough and thoughtful in reaching this point. It’s time to share this decision

with other stakeholders. Consider the best way to communicate the decision, taking into account the behavioral styles of yourself and others.

8. Evaluate the Decision. Lastly, take a step back and evaluate both your decision and the process you followed in reaching it. Are you satisfied with the decision after living with it? Would you make the same decision again based on what you know now? Celebrate your success and willingness to commit to a decision. File all your new knowledge and confidence away for the next time you work through the process.

Summary

In the wise words of Napoleon Bonaparte, “Take time to deliberate, but when the time for action has arrived, stop thinking and go in.” Decision making is indeed a process. It is a discipline that requires ongoing focus and commitment, and must also be constantly monitored versus our values. We must also always be mindful of the impact our decisions have on others, and contemplate different behavioral and communication styles when discussing or sharing decisions. In the end, we need to own and be accountable for our decisions. Chi Omega, through active and alumnae member activities, provides a wonderful opportunity to hone decision-making skills. Chi Omega provides a shared value system and network of reliable resources that can assist us in sound decision making as we navigate our way through life choices. **E**