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The IdeaBridge White Paper Series:
The Leadership Series:
Making Decisions



THE LEADERSHIP SERIES: MAKING DECISIONS

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Summary

Part of Leading is making responsible decisions. However, many Leaders, especially those new to the role, become torn over trying to find the 'perfect' solution. They want just one more piece of data, just one more person's opinion. This is all fine, but there comes a time when the decision must be made. That's what this article is all about. Taking action and making decisions at the Leader's level.

Making Decisions

- Once you come to a responsible decision, carry it out without hesitation or timidity. Timidity is not born of healthy caution, but is the stepchild of fear.
- Successful Leaders do not worry about the mistakes they have made. They know that mistakes are going to happen and they are willing to live with the consequences of their decisions. Too much time is wasted by people agonizing over a decision because they're afraid of making mistakes. Great Leaders are decisive and courageous.
- Business success results from acting with vigor, decisiveness, and confidence; one must not grope nor hesitate. In deciding to move, there can be no vacillation or indecision. Any vacillation will result in greater expense, loss of opportunity, and general discouragement. Once decisions are made, Leaders encourage immediate, vigorous execution.
- During change and chaos, the Leader's first responsibility is to grasp the actual situation, which is almost always hidden in a mist of uncertainty; that is, to assess the known elements correctly and to guess the unknown elements accurately. Then he must reach a decision quickly and carry it out forcefully and relentlessly through completion.
- A Leader, above all, exhibits a cool head - that is, he objectively processes information and correctly estimates its impact on his situation. Two qualities must accompany coolness. The first is decisiveness. Without decisiveness, other qualities are of little value. The second is intelligence. The Leader should have a talent for turning every situation into an advantage, for creating unexpected, but appropriate, improvisation in the face of obstacles.
- Under difficult circumstances, the Leader knows there is no time for the wise to offer long-winded advice nor for the brave to be angry. All must focus their efforts on the demands of the situation at hand. Therefore, it can be said that of all the dangers involved in leading competitive operations, timidity is the greatest. Most of the calamities which overtake an organization in competition arise from hesitation and fear of failure.
- You cannot erase the past with words. Do not second-guess decisions that have already been made. Do not undermine actions already begun. Do not assign blame for errors already made. Rather, focus your attention on doing the best thing in the present moment and planning for a better future.
- You are almost always better off with a "nearly-right" strategy today, than a "perfectly-right" strategy a year from now. Whichever strategy you pursue will involve mid-course adjustments. Leaders must learn to get comfortable taking action with a 60-70% plan, knowing that they will have inevitable adjustments along the way.



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- Most business ventures take at least twice as long, cost twice as much and bring twice the problems of your most conservative estimates. Further, you'll be lucky to achieve even half the profit you projected in your worst-case scenario. Knowing this, if the venture still looks good, go for it.
- A classic mistake is simply to not make any personnel changes during the honeymoon period. Sticking with direct reports that are not up to the task will squander precious time and energy. You must set a time limit by when you will make your staffing decisions...six months at most.
- The more you drive for decisions, and find yourself making those decisions instead of your senior team, the less powerful they will feel and the more frustrated you will become. You must drive them to decisions. Lay out the values and business philosophy of the company and demand that all decisions be made within that context. Then, let them make decisions; those who can't, or won't, must go.
- "There's a time for input and a time for execution. I will expect your input on major decisions and will carefully listen to your opinion. But once a decision has been made, everyone must support it 100% and intensely focus on its execution."
- At some point you will have to call your team in and say, "This is what we're going to do. The debating and challenging is now over. We're now going to execute and get there as fast as we can. And you're responsible and wholly accountable for making this happen in record time."
- The first step in solving a problem is determining whose problem it really is.
- You must work hard to avoid "group think" – a situation in which there is too much compatibility and a consensus is found too quickly without serious debate.
- Problems need to be reported immediately. In fact, you should usually know that something may become a problem before it actually does. Further, just reporting the problem is not acceptable. A solution, or solutions, must be presented at the same time.
- It's not enough for your decision to be the "right" decision. Oftentimes, even the "right" decision will not get the necessary support and you will be killed-off by the hidden or shadow politics of the organization. Build support early on for your initiatives before you announce or launch them publicly. Look for your lead-blockers to help build support and buy-in.