

DECISIONS, DECISIONS

The structured approach to making the right one

We make numerous decisions every day. But how should we respond when we are afraid of making the wrong one? In the book *Smart Choices: A Practical Guide to Making Better Decisions*, authors Howard Raiffa, Ralph L Keeney and John S Hammond explain that the solution is being proactive: Problem, Objective, Alternatives, Consequences and Trade-offs.

PROBLEM: WHAT MUST YOU DECIDE?

You can only get the right answer if you ask the right question. This means you must figure out the exact problem you're trying to solve. Get creative when defining the problem and don't be afraid to ask others for their perspective. The best approach is to use an open-ended question so the answer isn't just 'yes' or 'no'.

OBJECTIVES: WHAT DO YOU MOST WANT TO ACCOMPLISH?

Now that you know the question, understand what you're trying to achieve. Write down your concerns about this decision and turn these into objectives. These will be your guide. Keep asking 'why?' as many times as you can, and keep digging until you uncover what matters to you.

ALTERNATIVES: HOW CAN YOU ACHIEVE YOUR OBJECTIVES?

When you know what you want and why you want it, figure out how to get it. Be creative and come up with different ways to meet your objectives and solve your problem. It doesn't matter if they're 'unreasonable' because you'll evaluate and eliminate later. For now, just imagine what you'd do if nothing was holding you back.

CONSEQUENCES: HOW WELL DO YOUR ALTERNATIVES SATISFY YOUR OBJECTIVES?

Take your time when coming up with alternatives (as long as you're not just

doing it to avoid a decision). There will come a point where you have enough answers and must stop searching for the 'perfect' one that may not even exist. Now you must evaluate each option by describing its consequences. Some options will be inferior, in which case you can eliminate them right away. What you're left with are the ones that could work.

TRADE-OFFS: WHICH ALTERNATIVE BEST FULFILLS THE OBJECTIVES?

Different alternatives will achieve different objectives. But since you can't do them all (at least not at once), you have to choose which alternative achieves the objectives best. If you only have one objective, that is easy. But since few decisions are no-brainers, you'll have to prioritise. Rank your objectives from most important to least important, and then go with the alternatives that will best achieve those.

GET GOING

The best way to learn the fundamental skill of making decisions is to get started. Go out and find opportunities to make decisions instead of waiting for life to throw them at you. Small decisions won't need detailed analysis, but if you get into the habit of structured thinking, you will train yourself to handle tougher decisions when the time comes. **Man**

