

Make Skillful Decisions with IVY work life balance COACHING

What exactly is a decision?

It's a question we don't often ask ourselves. It is the result of a choice that leads to a course of actions. Basic forms of life use instinct to exist, humans use both instinct & choice to exist. Choice is what separates the amoeba from human beings.

Facing choices is not an easy task. The more choice we have, the more difficult the decision is to make. Once the decision is made, we still have choices of how to implement the decision & so the circle begins again – circles within circles!

How we deal with the choices & approach the decision-making process can have a great impact on our everyday lives & more crucially on the 'cross-roads of life' that we all find ourselves at some point.

The average human being makes 35,000 conscious decisions every day e.g. I'll have an egg for breakfast this morning: I will drive a little faster to work today as I'm a bit later than usual: I will have a drink of water rather than coffee before I switch my computer on.

There are even more unconscious decisions being made e.g. I'll digest my breakfast now: There is an object close to my eye, I will blink: I will put the car into top gear. Decisions like these are made without conscious thought. Imagine how much sleep we would get if we had to choose each breath.



Imagine how late we would be for work if we had to consciously decide to move each individual muscle to get us out of bed. The day would be over before it had begun.

Our brain receives over 4 billion bits of information every second. Only 2000 of these bits are used to make decisions. So there is a great deal of

information entering our brains that doesn't get used to make decisions. Where does that all go? Well, that's another book.

The decision making process

Unconscious decisions

These can be put into two categories.

1. Those our bodies are designed to do for us e.g. breathe, digest, and move. Physical disabilities or conditions may prevent or limit our ability to do some of these actions, in which case we need to make a conscious decision to use a piece of equipment or take a drug to make/encourage our bodies to perform the task we have chosen to do
2. Those we train our bodies & minds to do by creating a routine e.g. clean our teeth, drive. By repetitive, conscious behaviour, our bodies can learn to carry out certain decisions without much conscious thought. Examples of these are cleaning your teeth & driving. It's a kind of half-way house between making a fully unconscious & a fully conscious decision.

Some decisions are simple to make. The consequences, if something goes wrong, are not life threatening. If you decide to have cereal for breakfast instead of the usual toast, it will not normally be a life threatening event & could not be seen as a mistake on your part, just a change in your routine.

Conscious decisions

Some decisions are complex & require a great deal of thought. The consequences of this decision going wrong may have more of an impact on you and your business & home life.

Making an accurate choice & making the right decision is very difficult. There are so many ifs, buts & maybes that we know about & even more information that we don't know about at any given time, that there is really only a 'right' answer *at that moment in time*. It may change five minutes later.

So how can we ensure that the decision we make is the best one possible for us at the time? The solution is to use a system that will give us the best possible chance of getting things right. Learning how to make good decisions is a skill worth acquiring & like all skills it needs practise.

Preparation for skilful decisions

Our ability to make decisions depends on certain states of mind & some external conditions, such as

- Being Alert
- Having Confidence

Being Alert

The more wide awake & 'on the ball' we are, the more likely we are to make a skilful decision. Making a decision when you are tired or stressed will usually result in a poor decision. We all have times of the day when our energy levels peak & enable us to focus fully on tasks. Use the peaks in your day to your advantage & plan to make your decisions during this time. If you know you've more energy in the morning, then make decisions before lunch. If you are not a morning person, then put off making decisions until the afternoon or evening. Give yourself a chance!

If you're not aware of the best time of day for you, spend a day or two paying particular attention to your energy levels & get to know the best times. Biorhythms are a good way to find out your peak times. I suggest you find a Biorhythm specialist or, if you can't find one, use an online test to get an answer. If you do go online, please check it by carrying out your own observations before making any big decisions. You know your body better than a computer programme.

Having Confidence

There is a quote that says 'If you believe you can, then you're halfway there' by Theodore Roosevelt. Having confidence in your decision making abilities only comes with practise. If you can believe & trust in your ability to make skilful decisions, then you will make them more quickly & they will have the outcomes you want. If you lack confidence & belief in your decision making skills then you'll be prone to procrastination, stress & poor outcomes. That makes sense, but how do you gain confidence in order to make skilful decisions?

Decision Making Models will guide you through the process but there are many different models around, so which one do you choose? Which one can you have confidence in to guide you through the choices to a good conclusion? The only answer to that question is to do the leg work & try a few to see what works best for you. Only then will you have confidence in the model & subsequently confidence in your ability to make skilful decisions.



Edward de Bono's 6 Thinking Hats

I have a favourite decision making model & that is Edward de Bono & his 6 hats. Working through the Model gives you a 360° view of the situation. This method does give you more choices than you would normally have considered but when making an important decision it really matters that you have considered all angles. If you're deciding what to have for dinner tonight, this model is a massive waste of time. If you are having a very important guest round to dinner where you have to get things right in order to impress, demonstrate a point, win that contract or win over the in-laws, then it's worth spending some time working through this Model – located at the end of this book.

Firstly, let me introduce you to Dr Edward de Bono. He is one of the pioneers of Brain Training & has dedicated his life to help people all over the world to improve their thinking abilities and creativity skills. His book titled 'Six Thinking Hats Method' has been used by top business organisations, governments and world leaders but his tools have also been used by school children. His methods & models have been proven to help people of all levels of intelligence to make skilful decisions, faster*. The method is at the end of this e-book.

If the stakes are low, you can toss a coin & take a chance on the outcome. If the stakes are high, use this Model to reduce the chance of anything going wrong.

Changing your mind

Once you have invested time & effort in making a decision, implemented a plan to action it seems madness to change your mind, but it happens. Out of the blue, new information comes forward that in spite of all the planning you did, you had no way of knowing it was going to pop up. The information can come from new research, new events, different feelings, updated policies – absolutely anywhere.

Changing our minds is so common that scientists have devoted time to studying the process. Research has found that when a decision goes wrong & things turn out differently than expected, the orbitofrontal cortex, located at the front of the brain behind the eyes, responds to the mistake and helps us alter our behaviour**.

This enables us to learn from our mistakes & try again to make the next decision more skilful.

Every day is a school day!

*<https://www.edwdebono.com/>

** <http://www.cam.ac.uk/research/news/modelling-how-the-brain-makes-complex-decisions>

White



Gather all available data. Have you the skills or knowledge for this or do you need external help?

Red



Use your intuition or gut feelings. Focus on how people will react emotionally to your decision.

Black



What are the negatives & weak areas?

Yellow



What are the positives, the benefits? Be optimistic.

Green



Be creative. Let your imagination go wild

Blue



Process control. Must you take into account policies & procedures: Rules & regulations?