

LEADERSHIP COMPETENCY: BEING DECISIVE

Defining Characteristics

- Makes decisions without delay, despite ambiguous information, absence of clear direction or lack of consensus.
- Acts when opportunity and need dictate.
- Acts promptly to resolve pressing problems, even when support from others is not readily available.
- Responds quickly to get out of or restructure business agreements that show evidence of failing or losing advantage.
- Good at defining the problem.
- States objectives so that expectations and outcome decisions are clear.
- Can articulate the source of frameworks that determine how problem elements, decisions, and choices are evaluated in his or her organization.
- Collects necessary information about the problem.
- Encourages candid discussion around possible causes, relevant variables, possible difficulties, and desired outcomes.
- Can identify actions or outcomes that will interface with solutions.

Development Activities

1. Keep a decision-making tally at work for one week. How many decisions did you make? What type of decisions did you make? How many times did you reconsider decisions? What were most of your decisions about – money, employees, customers, use of resources, etc?
2. Make a list of those topics, issues or challenges about which you can easily be decisive. Make a list of those topics, issues or challenges about which it is difficult for you to be decisive. Compare the lists and discern the characteristics of those things about which it is easy to be decisive.
3. Read a biography about a decision-maker that you respect.
4. Critically review a recent situation in which you have acted decisively. Make a list of those factors that facilitated your acting decisively. Make a list of those factors that were obstacles or challenges to being decisive in that situation.
5. Conduct a cost-benefit analysis of your acting decisively. When you make decisions decisively what are the benefits for you, for your work, for the people with whom you work, or for your family? When you do not make decisions decisively what is the cost to you, for your work, for the people with whom you work, or for your family? Can you find motivation in the benefits? Can you find motivation in the costs?
6. For up-coming significant decisions that will require decisive action conduct some scenario planning. Explore the potential factors to be considered when making one of those decisions. Explore the pros and cons of various decision alternatives. Discuss those with someone else in order to hear yourself describe the things that will determine your ability to be decisive.
7. Spend time with someone outside of work that you particularly admire for his or her decision-making ability. Ask that person how becoming savvy about being decisive became a skill.
8. Review your decision-making process with someone you respect to get his or her feedback.

Training Resources

1. Decision-Making” CD Rom, Harvard Business School. www.hbr.com
Using realistic case studies, practice scenarios, and expert feedback, this interactive program will help you learn to identify and avoid thinking traps and biases, apply a process to simplify complex decisions, recognize the role intuition plays in decision making, and tackle fast decision making.
2. "Problem Solving and Decision-Making." Princeton, NJ: Kepner-Tregoe, (800) 537-6375, <http://www.kepner-tregoe.com/>
3. "Problem Analysis and Decision-Making." Stamford, CT: Achieve International, (800) 456-9390, <http://www.achievetglobal.com/>
4. “Groupthink”, a video available through the Harvard Business Review Catalog of Training Materials is an experiential look at how a team can talk itself into the wrong kinds of decisions because of pressures from group norms and operating expediency.

Websites

- http://www.mindtools.com/pages/main/newMN_TED.htm
Useful techniques to improve decision-making.
- <http://www.sjdm.org/> Web site of the Society for Judgment and Decision Making.
- <http://www.crisp-pub.com> Crisp Publications offers 50-Minute™ books and videos on decision-making.
- <http://www.kepner-tregoe.com/workshops/workshops.cfm>
Kepner-Tregoe offers seminars on problem solving and decision-making.

Recommended Readings

1. Argyris, Chris. "Interpersonal Barriers to Decision Making: What are They? What Damage Do They Do? What Can Be Done to Overcome Them?" Harvard Business Review: People Managing Your Most Important Asset, Boston, 1992
2. Covey, Stephen, A. Roger Merrill, and Rebecca R. Merrill. First Things First. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997.
Applies "The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People" to helping create a structure to support good decision-making.
3. Eisenhardt, Kathleen M. "Strategy as Strategic Decision Making." Sloan Management Review. Spring 1999, Vol. 40, No. 3., pp. 65-8.
4. Harvard Business Review on Decision Making
This authoritative collection helps you understand the fundamental theories and practices of effective decision making. Articles written by leadership experts. www.hbr.com
5. Kindler, Herbert. Risk Taking: A Guide for Risk Takers. Menlo Park, Ca: Crisp Publications, 1999. <http://www.crisp-pub.com>.
Frequently there are problems with decision-making because we are unable to take a calculated risk.
6. Messick, David M. and Max H. Bazerman. "Ethical Leadership and the Psychology of Decision Making." Sloan Management Review. Winter 1999, Vol. 37, No 2, pp 9-14.