

## DECISION MAKING

There are many ways to make decisions. The process to be used will depend on the situation and the person needing to make the decision. This presentation will describe four ways to improve decision making. A **FIFTH AND PROBABLY THE WORST WAY TO DEAL WITH A DECISION IS TO REFUSE TO FACE IT**. When this happens someone or something will make the decision for you and you will have to live with the consequences.

### DETERMINING WHICH DECISION MAKING-STRATEGY TO USE

When facing a situation in which you need to make a decision, there are some questions you can ask that will help you determine how to approach the situation.

1. Is the decision between a few alternatives?  
Is the time to make a decision really limited?  
If this the case, try the **Reasons For and Against** approach.
2. Do I only have a couple of options and do they look bad?  
If so, try the **Generating Alternatives** approach.
3. Is the situation complex?  
Do I need to look at a number of alternatives?  
Try the **Analysis of Alternatives** approach.
4. Can I solve this by examining it in relation to my short and long term goals?  
Try the **Goals Analysis** approach.

As you face different situations you may find that you want to combine some of these strategies or you may want to use other strategies of your own. What's most important is that you enter the process and make the decision yourself rather than letting it be made for you.

## EXAMINING REASONS FOR AND AGAINST

Describe the conflict briefly but specifically.

List all the reasons you should take this action under the “reasons for” column.

List all the reasons you shouldn’t take this action under the “reasons against” column.

Don’t evaluate the importance of the reasons as you write them down, and you don’t have to do one column at a time.

REASONS FOR	REASONS AGAINST
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
5.	5.
6.	6.
7.	7.
8.	8.
9.	9.
10.	10.

## **MAKING CHOICES BY COMPARING LISTS**

### **STRATEGY 1: REVIEWING THE LISTS**

Sometimes just generating the two lists will be enough to determine which course of action to follow. When the decision is not clear from the lists or when you want to be more sure of the course of action you have chosen, you can compare the lists using either one of the following strategies.

### **STRATEGY 2: COMPARING ITEMS IN THE LISTS**

Once you have completed your lists for and against, look at the first “for” item and find an “against” item of equal importance. Lightly cross out each item. In some cases it may take more than one “against” item to equal a “for” item or more the one “for” item to equal an “against” item. Cross out the items needed to achieve a balance. Continue matching items and drawing lines through them until all the items in one list are crossed out.

Solution. The column that still has items not crossed out is the choice you should make.

### **STRATEGY 3: NUMERICAL RATING**

After your lists “for” and “against” have been fully developed, assign each item a number between one and ten in terms of its importance. If you had a good paying job that you liked and one of the items on the list “against” was losing your job, you might rate it eight or nine. Give the most important items higher numbers and those that are less important lower numbers. After you have assigned each item a rating, add all the rating for the “for” items and write down the total. Then, add all the ratings for the “against” items and write down this total.

Solution. The column with the highest total is the choice you should make. This works best when there are about an equal number of statements for and against. If the number of reasons are not nearly equal, be sure to review the decision to be sure it also seems most reasonable.

## GENERATING ALTERNATIVES

Often when we are faced with making a decision, we get tunnel vision and we only focus on one or two choices. Often the best solution may be an alternative that we have not considered. To generate alternatives, people must stop focusing on the specific problem in the usual way and look for new and unusual ways to solve problems. The following is one way to do this.

1. Relax and forget the worst parts of the problem.
2. Think of as many ways as you can of dealing with the problem and write them on a sheet of paper. Don't worry about how impractical or unusual the ideas are.
3. After you have taken plenty of time to write down as many good and off-the-wall ideas as you can, review them and combine those that fit together.
4. Put these ideas on the form below.
5. Enter a check in the appropriate column.
6. Evaluate the alternatives that you'll try. The decision making process described in this handout can help you evaluate these alternatives.

---

ALTERNATIVE	I'LL TRY IT	I'LL CONSIDER IT	I WON'T TRY IT
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			

(Add additional pages if you need to.)

## **ADDING COMMON SENSE**

The purpose of analyzing decisions with these process is to help broaden and clarify your thinking and to increase your understanding of the situation you face. It is a tool to help you make a decision. If the results of the analysis don't seem right or feel right, then the process should be reviewed. Maybe some of the comparisons are not right. Maybe more alternatives need to be found. Maybe a different process of analysis needs to be used. Maybe the choice that didn't win in the analysis needs to be followed. If the choice from the analysis seems to fit, to feel right, then it should probably be taken.

## DECISION MAKING

There are many different types of decisions that you make each day. These range from making decisions about brushing your teeth, your family doctor, or your college major. You make many decisions automatically (such as personal habits or every day chores) while others decisions are more complex and take more time to make. Analyzing your values, the situation in which you find yourself, and the barriers that seem to confront you may all seem very confusing when a major decision is needed, unless the steps are clearly outlined.

There are several different ways to go about making decisions, but no matter what the process, the final decision must be one that you feel "right" about. Often just writing down the steps for the decision you need to make and talking over the alternatives with a friend or a counselor can make the decision-making process an easier one. Facing the situation and making a decision can often ease the conflict you are experiencing.

The following steps can be used as a general guide to help you making your decision once you have identified it.

1. State the decision you need to make in terms which can be observed and measured.
2. Gather information that will help you make your decision. (Include information on your personal values and goals along with facts about the situation.)
3. Identify all your choices or alternatives – write down all possible choices. (Brainstorming with a friend can help.)
4. List all the positive and negative consequences or outcomes of each choice or alternative.
5. Rate each remaining choice from "most important" to "least important," taking into consideration the good and bad consequences of each choice and your values.
6. Decide which alternatives to pursue, or which alternatives you will look into further. Use a process of elimination to get rid of the unrealistic or unacceptable alternatives (i.e., those that would conflict with your values).
7. Make your final decision. This may involve acting on one alternative at a time.
8. Act on your decision.
9. Evaluate your decision.

## DECISION MAKING EXERCISE #1

The following is an example of how to use the decision-making process in a everyday situation:

1. Decision: What am I going to do with my time tonight?
2. Information Gathered:
  - a. There are two good movies I would like to see
  - b. I have to read two chapters on psychology
  - c. I have a quiz tomorrow
  - d. All my friends are going to the movies
  - e. School is important to me
  - f. My friends are important to me
3. Choices/Alternatives:
  - a. Stay home and study
  - b. Go to the movies with my friends
  - c. Stay home and watch TV
  - d. Stay home and sleep
  - e. Go to a movie by myself
  - f. Go somewhere else

Unrealistic Choices:

As determined by you

  - e. Go to a movie by myself
  - f. Go somewhere else
4. Positive and Negative Consequences:
  - a. If I stay home and study:
    - I may feel lonely;
    - I may not get my work done;
    - + I'll feel good about my homework;
    - + I may get my work done;
    - + I can watch a TV movie when I get done with my work.
  - b. If I go to the movies with my friends:
    - + I may like the movie;
    - I may not like the movie;
    - I won't get my work done;
    - I may not enjoy myself because I'm thinking of the work I need to do.
  - c. If I stay home and watch TV;
    - + I may see a good movie;
    - I won't get my work done;
    - I won't get to be with my friends;
    - I may not like the movie on TV.

- d. If I stay home and go to sleep:
    - + I will get some rest;
    - I won't get my studying done.
  - e. If I go to the movies by myself: not possible.
  - f. If I go somewhere else: not possible.
5. Rate Each Remaining Alternative:  
Be realistic. Eliminate any other choices that are unacceptable to you.
- #1
- #2
- #3
6. Decide Final Alternatives:
  - a. Either stay home and study, or
  - b. Go to the movies.
7. Final Decision:
8. Act on It!
9. Evaluate the Decision:  
Did this decision help me to reach my goal of working toward my tow  
year degree?

## DECISION MAKING – EXERCISE #2

Take some time now to write down the steps to take for one of your short or long term decisions. Do this now and begin taking control of your life!

1. Decision:
2. Information Gathered: (Include Your Values)
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.
  - d.
  - e.

3. Choices/ Alternatives:
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.
  - d.

Unrealistic Choices/alternatives:

- e.
- f.

4. List Positive and Negative Consequences: (What will happen if I make these choices?)

a.                      Positive    Negative

- |    |  |    |
|----|--|----|
| 1. |  | 1. |
| 2. |  | 2. |
| 3. |  | 3. |
| 4. |  | 4. |

b.                      Positive    Negative

- |    |  |    |
|----|--|----|
| 1. |  | 1. |
| 2. |  | 2. |
| 3. |  | 3. |
| 4. |  | 4. |

5. Rating of Choices:

#1

#2

#3

6. Decide Final Alternatives:

a.

b.

7. Final Decision: (Review the consequences for each choice, thinking of all the good and bad consequences.)

8. Act on It!

9. Evaluate your Decision:

What was my short term or long term goal?

Did this decision help me to reach my goal?