

Decision Making and Problem Solving In 4 Simple Steps

Being involved in management positions will expose you to problems and opportunities that arise every day. It is of extreme importance to be able to make decisions that are good for your business within a reasonable amount of time. There are a few steps that can be followed to help facilitate the decision making process. The goal of decision making is to select the best alternative that is appropriate for the situation and make sure that it is used successfully.

1. Identify the Problem

The first step is to adequately identify the problem. This is sometimes the hardest part. Here is an example to illustrate: You find that your employees are quitting soon after they start. The problem behind this could be such things as the fact that you do not pay them well, the working conditions are bad, or that competition is offering better jobs. It is important to look at the whole picture and possibilities to determine the problem at hand.

Problems can be identified and brought to light in various ways. Usually businesses do various forms of planning and goal setting. When plans and goals are not reached, this can signify a problem. Management may have a problem brought to them. It is not uncommon for a lower level staff person to bring a problem to a manager that has the authority to deal with it. Keep in mind that many problems can be hidden and maybe employees do not want them to come to light. Problems can be brought into light anonymously or by a group of concerned individuals. Some problems are routine and are likely to come up. These problems are usually easier to solve than complex problems, which have multiple pieces and ramifications.

2. Generate Alternative Solutions

Once a problem or opportunity is brought out into the open, it is time to generate some alternative solutions. This process is typically referred to as brainstorming. Brainstorming is used in various daily activities and allows free thought to spiral and rebound off of itself. Brainstorming can also be done within the group setting, which can be explained by the phrase,

“two heads are better than one”. Come up with ideas that are more rational and standard, as well as ideas that are innovative and bizarre. There are many amazing developments that have occurred that at one time were unreasonable. Consider things such as space travel and people who dreamed of becoming professional sports players. These all started as possible courses of action. Humans have the tendency to focus on ideas that are easy for them to come up with. More common ideas tend to come out first. Brainstorming is just the tip of the iceberg. At this point you do not have to worry about analyzing every detail with great scrutiny, just let the ideas pop out!

3. Evaluate Alternatives

After all of your ideas are out, then it is time to analyze and tear them apart. At this point you want to make sure that the ideas are feasible. All decisions should be safe, legal, and abide by reasonable guidelines. The project must not take too many resources such as time, people, or money. Be able to evaluate your thoughts without bias. It is a good idea to get feedback on ideas from additional people because nobody wants to admit that their ideas are not good. The solution that you select should be the best solution possible. In any given situation there are many ideas that could work, but ultimately one solution should address all of the factors with less risk. Keep in mind long-term effects as well as the short-term effects. You do not want to have to resolve the same problem a year later. How will your solution affect others? Is it moral, ethical, and reasonably fair? Do technological, governmental, or political factors have an effect on your decision?

4. Choose and Implement the Best Solution

Go ahead and implement and evaluate a solution. This is where the rubber hits the road. At step four it is possible to realize that your solution is not useful and go with another plan.

Implementation has challenges. There are situations that you won't know the outcome until you try to solve the problem. For instance, will workers really strike if you do not give them a pay raise, or are they bluffing? Some solutions will also trigger another problem. Many people resist change as a whole because it is out of the ordinary. Some people are creatures of habit and prefer to do the same old things. Many problems have risk involved and the amount of risk that is willing to be taken on can vary in different situations.

A large part of implementing is making sure that the solution is successful and ongoing. Enough people need to have sufficient knowledge, resources, and authority to test the solution on a regular basis. The solution that is being put to use may not always be successful or may not have been implemented correctly. A common misconception is that problem solving is a one-time event. Problem solving is a continuous process of action as new problems arise every day. However, keeping a few steps in mind about problem solving can provide a good framework for making responsible decisions.

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