



A Healthy Outlook!

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Help! I Need to Make a Decision!

Even though most people make dozens of important and complex judgments every day, few of us have actually been trained to make good decisions. We start making basic decisions when we are young children, and we continue to follow the same simple process as we get older, even though the issues become much more complicated.

We learned to make decisions by watching

our parents and learning in school. Mostly, we learned by trial and error. Our first decisions were pretty simple—to choose pizza or hamburgers, to play softball or soccer, to wear the pink headband or the blue one. These decisions pretty much boiled down to choosing between X and Y.

According to the authors of *Smart Choices: A Practical Guide to Making Better Decisions* (see Reading List), most of us continue to

choose between X and Y without making certain that we are addressing the real problem in the first place. A second common mistake is rushing into a decision and hurrying to get it over with. We rarely step back from the decision and view it in a broader context. While it is more difficult and time-consuming, it is better to take your time and be sure you are seeing the big picture and the key issues.

Strategies for Making Better Decisions

Here are some decision-making tips:

1. Take your time making important decisions. Some situations require a deliberate and careful decision-making process.
2. Once the decision has been made, carry it out without hesitation.
3. If you can, delegate decisions to those who will carry them out. Authors Heller and Hindle (*Essential Manager's Manual*) advise managers always to be on the lookout for ways to push the decision-making process down a level. If you are making decisions for your family, consider how you can involve your children in the process.
4. Making decisions requires both intuition and logic. It's important to trust your gut, but be sure you are thinking logically.

5. Unless the situation is pretty straightforward, it is a good idea to generate as many ideas as you can. Learn the rules of brainstorming (see box) and throw lots of options into the hopper.
6. Look at the issues from different points of view. How do they look to the different groups they might affect?
7. Consider the immediate and long-term implications of each solution, including its impact on other people.
8. Consider the worst- and best-case scenarios, as well as the possibilities in between.

Deciding by Yourself Versus Involving Others

Involving others in your decision-making process helps you avoid the tendency to rush into a decision, hurrying to get it over with. When you take the time to consult others, you force yourself to step back

from the situation and see it in a broader context. While it is more difficult and

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time-consuming, getting the advice and support of others can help you produce better decisions.

Consider these points when seeking advice:

1. Determine whom to involve in the process. If it's a simple, low-risk decision, you may not need to involve anyone else.
2. If you do ask others for advice and suggestions, be prepared to respond to their input.
3. Determine who will need to approve your decision, and get that approval.

Consider these points when seeking support:

1. Think about who might resist your decision, and have a plan to manage that resistance. For example, you want to allow your daughter to have her friends sleep over on a weeknight during the summer, but you expect your husband will object because he has to get up for work the next day and doesn't want his sleep disturbed. Think about how you could plan the evening in a way to avoid disturbing your husband.

2. Identify ways to increase the chances that your decision will be supported. In the sleepover example, you could ask the girls' friends to bring sleeping bags and set up the basement for them to sleep in.
3. If your decision presents any risks, look for ways to minimize them.

Make This Work for You: Rules of Brainstorming

1. Write down the question you are addressing. For example, "Where shall we go on vacation?"
2. Think of as many ideas as you can.
3. Write down every idea, no matter how wild it seems.
4. No one is allowed to judge or evaluate any of the ideas in any way. This includes making faces, rolling eyes, and sighing.
5. The goal is to think of as many ideas as you can. Quantity is more important than quality.
6. After everyone is finished suggesting ideas, take a break.
7. After the break, discuss the ideas and edit the list. A solution will emerge.



Identify a situation in your life right now.

Be sure to choose something important and challenging. Apply the steps we have been exploring to this situation.

1. Describe the situation.
2. What are the options?
3. List the pros and cons of each option.
4. What do you need to consider when seeking advice?
5. What do you need to consider when seeking support?
6. What are the best options?
7. Who needs to be involved?
8. What should be delegated? To whom?
9. What resources would need to be secured?
10. What steps need to be planned, and what is their timing?

Reading List

Hammond, John, Keeney, Ralph, and Raiffa, Howard. *Smart Choices: A Practical Guide to Making Better Decisions*. Harvard Business School Press, 1998.

Heller, Robert and Hindle, Tim. *Essential Manager's Manual*. New York: DK Publishing, 1998. ■

Adapted from an article by Jeri Schaefer, M.A., a licensed therapist in Tower Lakes, in the Therapists Newsletter. Used with permission.

Meeting Mistakes

It can readily be said that many of us spend an awful lot of time at meetings. At times, these meetings can seem wasteful and mind numbing. However, they are generally necessary to help coordinate work within groups and can offer a place for you to shine—or not. There are a few major meeting mistakes that you never want to make. They include the following:

■ **Being unprepared** — If you get an agenda beforehand, read it, call the leader of the meeting and ask for background information, and figure out what you can bring to the table in discussion. If you're the leader, make sure all technical aides are working, confirm meeting room size and availability and provide an agenda in advance when possible.

- **Showing up late** — Being late damages your image and is disrespectful of other people's time. If you're the leader, you should never make the group wait for you.
- **Being a meeting hog** — Don't talk just to talk—speak when you have something to say; be blunt, be brief, be done. If you're the leader, it's your job to facilitate flow of the meeting. Don't let anyone hog the time.
- **Sitting silently** — Not participating can look bad to others. Try to engage in some conversation and make at least one suggestion. If you're the leader, encourage participation—ask for questions, comments, opinions.
- **Expressing rude body language** — No sleeping, slouching, sighing, hair tossing, chair spinning, leaving the room, eating loudly, rude gestures or facial expressions.

As the leader, manage anyone being rude—don't tolerate disrespectful behavior.

- **Arguing or putting others down** — Disagreements are fine, but don't expose mistakes in a condescending way or ignore their points. If you're the leader, you need to be professional when you disagree and not disregard people.
- **Leaving your cell phone on** — If you need to bring a phone, set it to vibrate so as not to disrupt the meeting. If you're expecting a call, let everyone know in advance.
- **Chewing gum** — The sound of chewing gum can be rude, annoying, and unprofessional. ■

Adapted from an article on CareerBuilder.com, 9/10/07

Manage Your "Stress Eating"

It takes a lot of will power and a plan to overcome "stress eating." The following tips are suggested by Pamela Peeke, M.D., of the University of Maryland School of Medicine.



- Eat every three to four hours so you head off hunger before it gets out of control.



- Outsmart your cravings—research has shown that, under stress, even animals tend to chew, gnaw, nibble, and eat when they're not hungry. So, chew a stick of gum, licorice, or a few Gummi Bears (low in calories and fat).

- Drink water—are you hungry or thirsty? Make sure you're not mistaking one for the other. Dr. Peeke suggests drinking at least eight glasses of water a day to stay properly hydrated.



- Take a hike—go for a five-minute walk instead of heading to the vending machine. This will redirect blood flow to your exercising muscles and away from your stomach, which can help suppress hunger.



You can find more health tips from Dr. Peeke at www.drpeeke.com/ ■

Adapted from an article located on the State of Minnesota EAP Web site. *Manage Your "Stress Eating"*

Questions to Ask When a Mental Health Provider Recommends Medication

When talking with a mental health provider about medication, it is always important to think of yourself as a consumer. The following questions are important to ask:

- Why are you suggesting this particular medication for me?
- When might I experience symptom relief and what might I notice first?
- What are possible side effects and what should I do if I experience them?
- Are there other medications I shouldn't use when taking the medication you are recommending for me?
- Should I avoid drinking alcohol or taking over-the-counter medication when taking this medication?
- How will I know if the medication is not working and how should I stop taking it?
- Who can I call if I have specific questions related to this medication?
- Do you recommend that I seek counseling in addition to taking this medication?
- Are there alternative medications or treatments that I can try?

Cancer Support

The EAP is maintaining a list of employees who have offered to be contacted to offer support to other employees who have been diagnosed with and/or are being treated for cancer. If you would like to talk with another employee who has had a cancer diagnosis, or whose loved one has been diagnosed, contact Debra Tipton on Outlook or at 240-314-1040.

Note to Supervisors: Building Trust in Your Staff

The following are a number of things you can do as a supervisor to win the trust of those you work with:

1. Show that you have others' interest in mind as well as your own—do what you can to enhance the success of others.
2. Communicate your feelings—show that you're a person who cares as well as calculates.
3. Admit there are things you don't understand—admitting you don't know about something makes you more believable when you say you do know something.
4. Share both good news and bad news—the more informed your staff is, the better decisions they can make. Also, nothing erodes trust like holding back bad news.
5. Show that you can work with upper management—demonstrating your ability to understand the school system's top priorities and having the ability to act on them is a powerful builder of trust.

Looking for Ideas

Are you an experienced teacher, administrator, secretary, building service worker, etc., who has workplace-related stress or time management tips? If so, let us know what those tips are. We would love to share them in future issues of *Healthy Outlook* and give you credit for it! You can pass on your idea to us either by phone (240-314-1040) or Outlook (Jeffrey_Becker@mcpsmd.org). We look forward to hearing from you!

Ask the EAP

Q: My grandson is currently living with us and is having a difficult time. Is he eligible to use EAP services?

A: The EAP provides services to all immediate family members living in your home. So, yes, your grandson can certainly make use of our services. ■

Do you have a question for the EAP? Send your questions via Outlook or the Pony to Jeff Becker.

"In everyone's life, at some time, our inner fire goes out. It is then burst into flame by an encounter with another human being. We should all be thankful for those people who rekindle the inner spirit.

Albert Schweitzer



Upcoming Events

MCPS Cancer Support Group, June 11, 4:30–6 p.m.
at 2096 Gaither Road, Rockville, Conference room 3.
Group meets the second Wednesday of the month.
Contact Debra Tipton on Outlook or at 240-314-1040.

National HIV Testing Day, June 27, 2008
An annual campaign produced by the National Association of People with AIDS (NAPWA-US) to encourage at-risk individuals to receive voluntary HIV counseling and testing.
Silver Spring, MD 20910, 240-247-0880, info@napwa.org

National Juvenile Arthritis Month, July 1–30, 2008
An event to focus on the fact that there are nearly 300,000 children in the United States with some form of arthritis or rheumatic disease.
Arthritis Foundation, P.O. Box 7669,
Atlanta, GA 30357-0669, 800-283-7800, www.arthritis.org

Children's Eye Health and Safety Month, August 1–31, 2008
Prevent Blindness America,
211 West Wacker Drive, Suite 1700, Chicago, IL 60606
800-331-2020: www.preventblindness.org

A Healthy Outlook!

To help employees with troubling issues before they become overwhelming.



EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE

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Important Notice: Information in *A Healthy Outlook!* is for general information purposes only and is not intended to replace the counsel or advice of a qualified health professional. For further questions or help with specific problems or personal concerns, contact your employee assistance professional.

You may contact us or send your questions and comments to
Debra_Tipton@mcpsmd.org

Please note that e-mail is not necessarily confidential.

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