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## Making Decisions: Leaning on Intuition

The majority of leaders thrive on left-brain thinking. That portion of the brain, of course, excels in number skills and logic. The right brain, on the other hand, contributes largely to insight and imagination, which surprisingly few leaders consider to be valuable decision-making skills.

Left-brain thinkers can "balance" their minds by learning to access their imagination and become more sensitive to the issues surrounding them. But can this "balancing act" have a positive affect on decision-making?

Yes. Intuition is simply the innate ability to make good decisions with less-than- complete data. Spinoza, the 17th-century philosopher, called intuition a "superior way of knowing ultimate truth without the use of prior knowledge or reason." Leaders, perhaps by necessity, tend to overemphasize facts, reason, and logic.

Unfortunately, logic and analysis can only go so far. In many cases, the use of personal intuition is the only way to increase available options. Beyond the boundaries of so-called analytical thought, intuition can dramatically increase your personal effectiveness. But how?

Part of the answer comes from an understanding of the intuitive process. In a typical business scenario, intuition is actually created or sparked by a combination of three events. First, a question, problem, or crisis arises, or a decision is required. The second element is the increased awareness of a clearly defined goal. The third element is a sensitivity to situations and circumstances that affect the decision you face.

By comparing your problem or situation with your intention or objective, you heighten personal receptivity to new thoughts and solutions. This process helps determine whether one direction will better suit the achievement of your goals, or whether another path will lead to a different and more desirable outcome.

Adding awareness of a clearly defined goal brings a whole new level of reasoning. Increased awareness facilitates the recognition of factors that might contribute to a given situation or a specific solution. Awareness acts on both problem and objective, serving to more clearly define both elements. The end result of this mental "melding" process is innate, intuitive wisdom – the required and often missing element in the process of decision-making.

### Using Intuition

Mere understanding and acceptance of the mental process of intuition doesn't make it easier to follow innate wisdom or instinct. This difficulty – the constant battle between the need for reason and logic and the desire to follow one's instincts – led scientist Albert Einstein to hang a sign in his Princeton office. The sign read, "Not everything that counts can be counted, and not everything that can be counted counts."

Whether you prefer to call it a "gut feeling," "a hunch," or "business instinct," you probably use intuition in decision- making on a fairly regular basis. Ray Kroc, who initially balked at the 2.7 million-dollar price tag for the McDonald's franchise, said his "funny bone instinct" urged him to go ahead and close the deal. The question begs itself: Can your intuition make you another Ray Kroc? Perhaps! By creating a greater awareness of your own intuitive nature, you can learn to trust your instincts, even when you have evidence to the contrary.

Start with some quiet time alone. A quiet mind gives way to patience and relaxation. None of us likes to make decisions under pressure; this practice tends to thwart your intuition and forces you to rely solely on incomplete, mismanaged, or misunderstood data. Seek intuitive "impressions" that you can examine, study, and ponder. As you increase your awareness of clearly defined goals, the central problem comes into sharper

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focus. This process is the genesis of your intuitive "edge," and the more you seek and trust it, the harder and more successfully it will work for you. Most leaders and managers have a hard time with this first step. After all, experience has taught the value of making careful decisions based on sound data. As Bill Gates points out, at some point the data finally runs out. What do we do then?

#### Deciding to Decide

Many individuals in positions of leadership react to a lack of data by deciding not to decide. A target date is the best and easiest cure for this sort of procrastination. When the deadline rolls around, you've committed to making a decision. Meanwhile, your intuitive "edge" may have provided the best answer.

The real issue, however, is developing a greater level of self-reliance. Psychologist Herb Goldberg blames past conditioning for the general lack of executive self-reliance. "The struggle to learn to listen and respect intuitive, inner prompt-ings," Goldberg says, "is the greatest challenge of all. Conditioning has been so powerful that it has all but destroyed our ability to be self-aware."

Intuition Specialist Laura Day maintains that, in business, individuals are most successful when they simply try to be themselves. "If you tune into the integrity of your own vision, your own desire, and your own creativity," Day says, "you can achieve whatever you want."

The process of "tuning in" is as individual as each of us. For example, Thomas Edison was famous for retiring to take a nap when faced with a particularly vexing problem. The inventor would often jerk awake with a solution to his difficulty. His assistants wondered aloud how Edison ever got anything done. To them it seemed as though he slept all the time!

Edison's example proves a vital point: Every great inventor, innovator, thinker, businessperson, or leader has been considered a fool at one time or another. What transformed these individuals into the people we strive to emulate was their ability to move ahead by trusting their intuition, insight, and faith in themselves.

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