

# SIGMA

## Leadership Series



**Great Leaders  
are Decisive**



## GREAT LEADERS ARE DECISIVE

“ In any moment of decision, the best thing you can do is the right thing, the next best thing is the wrong thing, and the worst thing you can do is nothing.

– Theodore Roosevelt

Making decisions that are well-informed and time-sensitive is a crucial part of being a successful leader. Decisive leaders seek out the appropriate information they need to make good decisions. In addition, they show an understanding of the knowledge held by their direct reports, colleagues, and leaders. This helps them gather information from these resources before making a final decision. Important decisions can't always wait until every option has been dissected. Effective leaders are able to identify and obtain critical information and gauge when enough detail has been collected in light of the potential outcomes.

Decisiveness is the ability to make clear-cut and timely decisions with the appropriate amount of information. In the workplace, decisiveness is key to effectively executing plans and achieving goals. It is important to balance the costs of continuing to deliberate, gather information, and delay a decision versus the cost of making a poor choice. Decisive individuals are aware of these competing costs and weigh them carefully. Most importantly, decisive leaders make decisions that are clear and final. This skill can make the difference between plans that lack direction and those that are focused on achieving objectives.

In assessing your ability to be decisive, ask yourself the following questions:

- Do I gather the right amount of information before making decisions?
- Do I use all my resources to collect the right kind of information when making decisions?
- Am I able to weigh the costs of analyzing options versus the costs of a poor decision?
- Do I use careful evaluation, or do I rely on intuition to make decisions?
- How do I gauge if a decision is too urgent or important to be put off?

### Becoming More Decisive

**Identify and gather essential information:** An important part of being decisive is being able to identify the information you *need* to make a good decision. To clarify, when faced with a choice, analyze the situation to understand what you need to know. Then, use all available resources to collect the essential information. Being decisive is not just about making a choice on your own; draw on the expertise and experience of others around you. In short, effective information gathering is a requirement of good decisions on tight timelines.

**Know when to hone your focus:** We rarely get the chance to focus on one decision at a time because we also often have other priorities, tasks, and obligations. Work on recognizing when some decisions are more urgent or more important than others. We can't dedicate all of our time to decision-making, so prioritizing effectively is critical. Recognizing the potential benefits or costs of a choice compared to other decisions vying for your attention will help you better allocate your time and energy. Consider prioritizing urgent decisions in the short-term, which can leave you more time and resources to tackle other decisions or tasks that were temporarily set aside.

**Understand your tendencies:** All of us have different habits when it comes to making decisions. For example, some of us prefer to carefully evaluate every option and consider every possible circumstance. Others prefer to “go with their gut” and rely on their instincts for even the most important decisions. Being more decisive requires that you examine how you’ve made decisions in the past. Being aware of how you usually *want* to approach decisions will help you learn how you *should* approach them. Remember, neither intuition- or reason-based decision making approaches are inherently bad. That is to say, switching between them or blending the two will stop you from relying on the wrong approach and making a negative impact on the quality of your decisions<sup>1</sup>.

## Start Doing These 3 Things Now to Improve Your Decisiveness

The following steps can help you become better at making decisions:

1. **Make note of your resources.** Take stock of the expertise and knowledge of those around you, especially your direct reports. Research suggests that employees have better attitudes and performance when they participate in decision-making. Using your resources to gather information can not only improve your own decision-making abilities, but can also have positive consequences for your team and company<sup>2</sup>.
2. **Prioritize effectively for each part of your role.** Different parts of your job might require that you determine urgency or importance in distinct ways. Consider if you are accounting for the different aspects of your role when you evaluate whether one decision takes precedence over another. Take the time to develop decision-making guidelines that recognize these differences, because good decisions are unlikely to be the result of a “one size fits all” process. Knowing how to evaluate urgent decisions across different facets of your job can boost your decisiveness. It can help you focus on the key parts of each situation, as well.
3. **Work on being comfortable with uncertainty.** Wanting to make the right choice can lead to stress and anxiety about decisions<sup>3</sup> and make you indecisive. The truth is that, in most cases, you cannot have all of the information or advice you want to make a decision. Therefore, accept when time constraints or other circumstances have brought you to a decision point that cannot be postponed. Increase your comfort with the uncertainty that remains after making a tough call. Finally, remind yourself that you’ve done all you can with the time, resources, and information available to you.

## Resources



[Decisiveness – Leadership Roll Call](#)



[What Sets Successful CEOs Apart?](#)



Develop your ability to be decisive by taking advantage of SIGMA's coaching services.

Contact SIGMA for coaching on developing your skills as a leader.

SIGMA Assessment Systems, Inc.

Email: [support@SigmaHR.com](mailto:support@SigmaHR.com)

Call: 800-265-1285

## References

- <sup>1</sup> Phillips, W. J., Fletcher, J. M., Marks, A. D. G., & Hine, D. W. (2016). Thinking Styles and Decision Making: A Meta-Analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 142(3), 260-290.
- <sup>2</sup> Pereira, G. M., & Osburn, H. G. (2007). Effects of Participation in Decision Making on Performance and Employee Attitudes: A Quality Circles Meta-Analysis. *Journal of Business Psychology*, 22, 145-153.
- <sup>3</sup> Chen, C. Y., Rossignac-Milon, M., & Higgins, E. T. (2018). Feeling Distressed From Making Decisions: Assessors' Need to Be Right. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 115(4), 743-761.