LEADERSHIP

Five Things I Know About Making Good Decisions:

Measure Twice, Cut Once

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Many of our decisions are made out of habit, framing, or wishful thinking. Five less-used approaches that work on both a conscious and unconscious level.

"Measure twice, cut once." English proverb

Every day, we're faced with multiple decisions, from small (chips or a salad with that?) to those with enormous impact and implications for you or for others (which candidate should we hire? Which offer should I accept? Who should I vote for? Will I start my own company? Should I put Mom in a nursing home?) As recent behavioral science research reveals, many of our decisions are made out of habit, by the way we or others frame our choices, by going along with what those we know and like are choosing, by succumbing to wishful thinking or fear-mongering, or by accepting biased information without checking it out. Making decisions that are based on good data and analysis, where implications and consequences are thought through, is not automatic and certainly not easy. Here are five less-used approaches – ones that operate on both a conscious and unconscious level that may help you make better decisions.

1. **Identify the "big picture" goal you're trying to achieve through making the decision.** Then come up with at least ten alternative ways to achieve that result. Often, we focus too much on the means and not enough on the end.
2. **Develop a strong set of criteria that any decision you commit to must meet.** Then use the criteria either to help you make a choice among options or to see what the issues will be with a specific decision and take action to deal with them.
3. **Frame your goal as a problem you're trying to solve or an opportunity you want to respond to.** Then find at least ten different ways you could frame that problem or opportunity. Each way you frame it should provide a different set of solutions or choices.
4. **Discover the decision you prefer or are leaning toward.** This is not always obvious. You can instruct your unconscious mind to give you a signal by the end of the day – or in a dream so you'll know the first thing in the morning. As silly as it sounds, you can also use "fortune telling" tricks such as a Ouija board or tea leaves. The purpose

of this is only to discover what choice your unconscious mind prefers – then subject it to some kind of analytical process such as the suggestion below.

5. **Subject your preferred decision to a "devil's advocate" process.** Marshal every argument you can against it (or ask a friend to do so). Don't counter them – just write them down. This list may be useful later as the basis for risk mitigation. Develop an exaggerated "worst case scenario" and ask yourself if you could live with the consequences. If not, make another choice from the multiple ideas you've developed and put it through an equally rigorous process.

Here's a bonus. Ask yourself, "If I were my best friend, what advice would I give me?" Getting outside of yourself is often the best way to avoid the most common errors in our thinking.

If I were my best friend, what advice would I give me?

Originally published on LinkedIn, November 4, 2014.

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Founder of **The Influence Guru**, Kim Barnes is a coach, facilitator, and author with more than forty years of experience in leadership, influence, and organization development. She was a founder and, for many years, CEO of Barnes & Conti Associates, and developed or co-developed programs including *Exercising Influence*, *Inspirational Leadership*, *Intelligent Risk-Taking*, *Consulting on the Inside*, and *Managing Innovation*. She is the author of six books, including *Exercising Influence* (Wiley) and *Building Better Ideas* (Berrett-Koehler). She works with enterprise companies, government agencies, small businesses, and individuals from the San Francisco Bay Area.

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