

How To Decide

We all make decisions every day, all day. Leaders must carry the burden that their job entails making decisions that have implications for others. When educational leaders make decisions the impact is felt by teachers, families, communities, and most importantly, students. We all make good decisions and bad ones. Yet, even with a good decision, a flawed process or poor communication will result in a tainted perception and outcome. Leaders are taught, and often learn via trial and error, the elements of a good decision. However, I have found that guidance relative to a consistent process is lacking. If you ask someone how they make decisions, you will often hear a general response about what they value. Rarely, do leaders have a clear and articulated process or set of steps, which I would argue is very important to ensure integrity and consistency amidst a very messy and lonely role. Here is a VERY BRIEF explanation of mine:

2 Primary Considerations:

Who. Not every decision should be made by the top leader in the organization. Intentionally, I consider the chain-of-command and what will ultimately lead to the highest level of ownership and follow-through. Then, I determine the individual or team that should be responsible to decide.

How. When groups of people coalesce and agree, decisions come easy and are embraced. Yet, not all decisions can or should be made by committee or via a vote. Once I determine who will be responsible for a decision, I construct what I believe will be the most effective steps . . .

My One, Two, Three Decisions:

One. A #1 Decision is simply one I make. I weigh the options, consider the implications, and I simply decide. Either these are less important decisions others would rather not make or spend time discussing, or it is politically advantageous for the leader to accept sole responsibility.

Two. A #2 Decision is when I need feedback and the perspective of others. Whether I use an informal round-table discussion or a sophisticated strategy to gather input, I need to gather more knowledge or simply know how others feel. After I do so, I consider the feedback and then decide.

Three. A #3 Decision is when group consensus is needed. The decision moves from “I” to “we”. For a quality #3 decision two things need to be in place: 1. A definition of consensus- I don’t recommend a simple majority. 2. A procedure for reaching consensus- I like the ‘Fist To Five’ method:

Most Important Action:

COMMUNICATION: Before the decision AND after, I tell others and announce whether the decision will be a #1, #2, or #3. I have found that this level of clarity builds trust. Even if one does not appreciate what is decided, honest and transparent communication shows the integrity of the process.

***E Hubbard:** “It does not take much strength to do things, but it requires a great deal of strength to decide what to do.”*