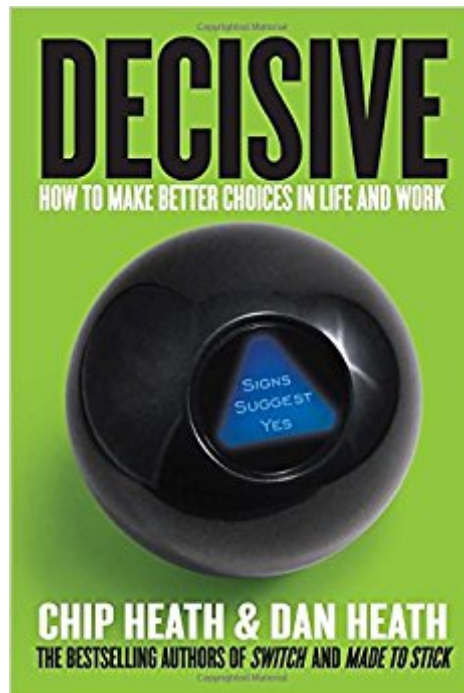




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Decisive: How To Make Better Choices In Life And Work



Synopsis

Chip and Dan Heath, the bestselling authors of *Switch* and *Made to Stick*, tackle one of the most critical topics in our work and personal lives: how to make better decisions. Research in psychology has revealed that our decisions are disrupted by an array of biases and irrationalities: We're overconfident. We seek out information that supports us and downplay information that doesn't. We get distracted by short-term emotions. When it comes to making choices, it seems, our brains are flawed instruments. Unfortunately, merely being aware of these shortcomings doesn't fix the problem, any more than knowing that we are nearsighted helps us to see. The real question is: How can we do better? In *Decisive*, the Heaths, based on an exhaustive study of the decision-making literature, introduce a four-step process designed to counteract these biases. Written in an engaging and compulsively readable style, *Decisive* takes readers on an unforgettable journey, from a rock star's ingenious decision-making trick to a CEO's disastrous acquisition, to a single question that can often resolve thorny personal decisions. Along the way, we learn the answers to critical questions like these: How can we stop the cycle of agonizing over our decisions? How can we make group decisions without destructive politics? And how can we ensure that we don't overlook precious opportunities to change our course? *Decisive* is the Heath brothers' most powerful and important book yet, offering fresh strategies and practical tools enabling us to make better choices. Because the right decision, at the right moment, can make all the difference.

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Q&A with Chip Heath & Dan Heath Q. People often feel overwhelmed by decisions, decisions, decisions. What makes us so indecisive? A. If you're feeling indecisive, chances are you don't have the right options yet. In the book we describe four key "villains" of decision-making - common traps and biases that psychologists have identified. One of them is called "narrow framing," meaning that we tend to get stuck in one way of thinking about a dilemma, or we ignore alternatives that are available to us. With a little effort, we can break out of a narrow frame and widen our options. For instance, one expert we interviewed had a great quote: "Any time in life you're tempted to think, 'Should I do this OR that?', instead, ask yourself, 'Is there a way I can do this AND that?' It's surprisingly frequent that it's feasible to do both things."

Q. You show that the same decision process can be applied to many domains - health decisions, career decisions, business decisions - but doesn't a decision "process" take way too much time? A. Not necessarily. In this book, we're not interested in complex decision models or elaborate decision trees. Often the best advice is the simplest, for instance, the suggestion to "sleep on it." That's great advice - it helps to quiet short-term emotion that can disrupt our choices. But it still takes 8 hours, and it doesn't always resolve our dilemmas. Many other decision aids require only a simple shift in attention. Doctors leaning toward a diagnosis are taught to check themselves by asking, "What else could this be?" And colleagues making a difficult group decision can ask, "What would convince us, six months down the road, to change our minds about this?"

Q. Why did you call the book Decisive? A. Being decisive isn't about making the perfect decision every time. That isn't possible. Rather, it's about being confident that we've considered the right things, that we've used a smart process. The two of us have met a lot of people who tell us they agonize endlessly about their decisions. They get stuck in a cycle where they just keep spinning their wheels. To escape that cycle, we often need a shift in perspective. We describe a simple technique used by former Intel chief Andy Grove to resolve one of the toughest business decisions he ever faced, one that he and his colleagues had debated for over a year. And what was this profound technique? Nothing fancier than a single, provocative question! In the book we also highlight a second question, inspired by Grove's technique, that can often resolve personal

decisions quickly and easily. Q. So how do I help my teenage son not to make a bad choice? A. Unfortunately, no one has solved that problem. But we offer some simple tools that help people give better decision advice. (Often it's easier to spot the flaws in other people's thinking than in our own.) As an example, the phrase "whether or not" is often a warning flag that someone is trapped in a narrow frame. So if your son is debating "whether or not to go to the party tonight," that's your cue to widen the options he's considering. (Horror movie? School basketball game? A head-start on trigonometry coursework?) For important decisions, even a little improvement can pay big dividends.

"A leader's most important job is to make good decisions, which minus perfect knowledge of the future is tough to do consistently." The Heath brothers explain how to navigate the land mines laid by our irrational brains and improve our chances of good outcomes. -Inc.

I highly recommend *Decisive* as a valuable aid to making more objective decisions. The Heath Brothers do a great job laying out a better and more memorable process for making decisions while illustrating the principles with a wide variety of examples. They begin by discussing how the normal decision making process proceeds in 4 steps, each of which has a "villain" that can negatively impact it. To quote from their introduction: "You encounter a choice. But narrow framing makes you miss options." "You analyze your options. But the confirmation bias leads you to gather self-serving information." "You make a choice. But short-term emotion will often tempt you to make the wrong one." "Then you live with it. But you'll often be overconfident about how the future will unfold." They spend the remainder of the book detailing a process to make better decisions - the WRAP process: "Widen your options" "Reality Test Your Assumptions" "Attain Some Distance" "Prepare to Be Wrong." Each part of the process has several powerful ideas that are worth chewing on and implementing in the context of one's life. I have chosen a few of the ideas to give you a flavor of what is in store: For widening your options, it is important to avoid a narrow frame. In order to make sure you challenge yourself to do this, they propose an idea called the Vanishing Options Test - what would you do if the current alternatives disappeared? Here is a key quote: "When people imagine that they cannot have an option, they are forced to move their mental spotlight elsewhere - really move it - often for the first time in a long while." For Reality testing your assumptions. They have a chapter on "consider the opposite" - and there is an approach from Roger Martin that recommends for each option you are looking at, ask yourself "What would have to be true for this

option to be the right answer?" This is an especially powerful concept in a business context where sides may be talking past each other - this helps reset the context to analyzing the options rather than arguing past each other. In attaining some distance, they cover a simple but powerful question that is really helpful for a personal decision (though it applies in business contexts as well). The question is: "What would I tell my best friend to do in this situation?" For preparing to be wrong, they cover the idea of a tripwire - something to make us come back and revisit the decision. This helps in making sure that past decisions get revisited periodically. This is especially important in reminding us that we have a choice in our actions and we are free to revisit those decisions we made in the past to make sure they are still meeting our needs. I find this important for reminding myself to remain actively engaged rather than passively falling into the status quo. There are many other powerful techniques and ideas spread throughout the book. Some of my favorites are: prevention versus promotion focus, zoom out/zoom in, ooching, and pre-mortems. I highly recommend purchasing the book and integrating its concepts into your life in order to make better decisions. Here are a few related thoughts and items that others may find interesting: For reality testing your assumptions, see Richard Feynman's "Cargo Cult Science" article (freely available on the internet) I have found the book Making Great Decisions in Business and Life by David Henderson and Charles L Hooper to be helpful as well. An interesting course on decision making is also made available by the Teaching Company (the course is taught by Michael Roberto who is mentioned in the book in the section on Recommendations for Further Reading) For a powerful article on choices and values, see David Kelley's article "I Don't Have To" (also available freely on the internet) The March 2013 Harvard Business Review has an article by Heidi Grant Halvorson and E. Tory Higgins related to prevention and promotion mindsets Please note that this review is based on an advance copy (Uncorrected Proof) of the book that the authors made available via their website (a "secret" buried in a David Lee Roth story about tripwires). I enjoyed the book so much that I pre-ordered the hardcover right after finishing the advanced copy

Do you want to make better, more confident decisions in life and work? "Decisive" will help you. Many decisions regarding career choices, corporate mergers and acquisitions, and personal life are poor. A lot of research has explored problems with decision-making; "Decisive" presents a process for making better decisions. The authors of Decisive, Chip and Dan Heath, maintain that a good process is essential to making good decisions, whether in work or personal life. They identify four major obstacles to making good decisions: narrow framing, confirmation bias, short-term emotion, and overconfidence. Benjamin Franklin's famous maxim, "Don't put off till tomorrow what you can do today," is a good example of the importance of making good decisions. The authors of Decisive, Chip and Dan Heath, maintain that a good process is essential to making good decisions, whether in work or personal life. They identify four major obstacles to making good decisions: narrow framing, confirmation bias, short-term emotion, and overconfidence. Benjamin Franklin's famous maxim, "Don't put off till tomorrow what you can do today," is a good example of the importance of making good decisions.

algebra. In which pros and cons are balanced against each other, is not a very good decision-making process because it addresses only one of the four obstacles. The Heath brothers propose the WRAP process to specifically address them: Widen your options (to counteract narrow framing), Reality-test your assumptions (to counteract confirmation bias), Attain distance before deciding (to counteract short-term emotion), and Prepare to be wrong (to counteract overconfidence). Chip and Dan Heath summarize a wide range of literature on factors in decision making from psychology, economics, and management and illustrate their points with examples from many areas, including retailing, corporate mergers, advertising and marketing, high-tech business, scientific research, college and career choices, and personal relationships. Like Chip and Dan Heath's earlier books, such as *Made to Stick*, *Decisive* is engaging to read and practical. A feature of the WRAP process is that you can immediately start making better decisions by using only one or two of the elements of the method, such as the "Vanishing Options Test," "ooching" (performing a small experiment to test your hypotheses), the "10/10/10" perspective, or setting tripwires. The more of the method you use, the better your decisions will be, but you can "ooch" your way to better decisions almost immediately. Since reading "Decisive" I have been using elements of the WRAP process in making personal and business decisions and already see an improvement in the quality of those decisions. I purchased copies of "Decisive" for relatives who are facing college and career decisions and I think the WRAP process will help them make better decisions in those areas. And I have been recommending "Decisive" to my colleagues and staff too, to help them improve their decisions.

Superlative book. I love the book so much that I have created a workshop that I have given to many groups of executives and they all find it invaluable. Here is what I find most useful: 1) I have now created mental trip-wires to alert me when I am going down the path of a wrong decision. For an example, there are never good either-or decisions - if you only have two options, always find a meaningful third. This book helps provide ways to find good third options. 2) In relationship with friends and clients, this has given me a great way to approach problems when someone is struggling with a decision. For example, I know someone who was struggling between different colleges. I suggested that when they took tours, they not only asked students at the college what they liked about the college, but to ask, "So this is truly a good school - but no school is the perfect fit for everyone. Can you give me three reasons why this school may not be a good fit for

someone?" This really helped her in making her decision. I don't want to repeat what others have already said, but their "WRAP" method is brilliant. It is a quick read (the audio book is good too) and will really impact how you make future decisions.

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