

Human frailties bedevil decisions



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My Business

We are all judged on the personal and professional choices we make, but few of us put any serious thought into the formal process needed to make the right decision at the right time.

In theory, the process of business decision-making should be relatively straightforward. We should gather the best data available, seek expert advice from all interested parties, and make a measured decision that is communicated clearly. But we have all made wrong choices or found ourselves paralysed by indecision at

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some stage.

Help is at hand. *Brilliant Decision Making* is a new book by Robbie Steinhouse, a successful entrepreneur and business coach. Not only does he have to make tough decisions every day in his property and insurance businesses, he also works one-on-one with business people to address the human frailties that might affect their judgment.

His study of neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) showed him that decisions should always be flexible, so they can be altered in mid-flow if circumstances change. In theory, the big strategic decisions are relatively straightforward; the challenge is how to carry them out.

Steinhouse summarises good decision-making as having three distinct stages. First, the decision should be put through a process simulator, where you assume the answer to a question is "yes", and you then examine what the consequences might be.

If the results are positive, there should then

be a second stage of formal preparation involving other people, taking into account their various agendas and desired outcomes from the decision. Third, there should be a distinct moment of decision, which should address all the consequences of any proposed action.

Most business decisions require you to influence others and, ideally, persuade them of your point of view. But effective leadership can also require explaining that you are going to make a certain decision anyway.

Steinhouse says that to understand good decision-making is to acknowledge that we are complex biological creatures. Our brains have a neocortex, which is good at analysis, connected to a limbic system, which is responsible for our emotions. The two have to work in harmony for decision-making to be truly effective. A perfect metaphor can be found in the television programme *Star Trek*, with the interaction between the logical Mr Spock and the emotional Captain Kirk.

Steinhouse believes the key to good decision-making is self-awareness. It is important that we differentiate carefully between our own personal, emotional issues and the business challenges that we face. It takes a strong leader to admit to themselves that they might need mentoring or even counselling to address personal demons, so their business judgments are not clouded by self-interest.

Steinhouse also warns that while famously successful decision-makers claim to be driven primarily by their instincts, these have always been honed by many hours of practical experience, mixed with considerable self-awareness.

Albert Einstein is often quoted as explaining that you can never solve a problem on the same intellectual level at which it was created. Resolving to understand the process itself could be the best decision of all.

'Brilliant Decision Making', by Robbie Steinhouse, is published by Prentice Hall

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