

How to be more effective by making fewer decisions

Do you find that you are continually making business decisions, yet struggle to make significant progress on key issues? The job of managers is to make decisions and manage the related actions that improve the effectiveness of your organisation. However, you can find yourself trying to sort out too many issues at any one time, preventing you from really achieving your objectives.

In the animal kingdom, the creatures at the top of the food chain hunt their food sporadically not continually. Those lower down the chain, however, are always grazing and eating. Similarly, highly effective managers are able to free up their time for other added-value activities, whereas the less effective are forever head-down in the latest 'urgent' issue.

There are three practical ways that you, as a manager, can release time by focusing your efforts on fewer, more important decisions.

1. **Focus your problem-solving on cause, not effect.** When you have a leaking roof you will initially make the decision to put a bucket underneath the hole to catch the drops of water and adapt to the new situation. However, if you are spending all your time on adaptive decisions - the equivalent of replacing the bucket - you will be making decisions continually. On the other hand, if you decide to fix the roof, you only have to make one decision. *How many of your problem-solving decisions are adaptive rather than corrective?*
2. **'Do nothing' is often a good decision.** When faced with an issue or potential decision there is an immediate reflex response to do something about it. However, doing nothing is often the best course of 'action' for many issues you face for two reasons. First, many issues resolve themselves. It is always interesting, for example, to see how many issues and 'emergencies' took place while you were away on vacation, only to be resolved without you having to take any action. Secondly, some issues just aren't important enough to justify the action required to remedy the situation. *How many of your decisions do not have a material impact on the performance of your organisation?*
3. **Ask yourself if you're the right person to make the decision.** Your team members are often in a better place to make decisions than yourself (no matter what your ego may tell you). If you find that too many decisions are coming up the hierarchy to you for sign-off you may find that you haven't defined your intent sufficiently clearly and they are uncertain as to what is expected of them. *How many times have you made decisions that would have been better made by someone else?*

What techniques do you use to focus on those decisions where you can have the biggest impact?