Deciding How to Decide: A Decision Making Guide

By Kevin Eikenberry
Chief Potential Officer
The Kevin Eikenberry Group

A Companion Learning Tool to this video
Decisions are everywhere – and as a leader, I know you face them all day long.

And while there are many ways to make them, many of us revert to our habits most of the time.

Think about the leaders you have worked for and observed. Some make largely unilateral decisions, others engage in long conversation to share information and ideas before deciding . . . and everything in between.

The challenge for us as leaders is more than just making decisions, but making good decisions that others will follow and be committed to. Let’s start with this graphic.

The Decision Curve

This graph or curve shows us the basic relationship between time taken to make a decision and how committed, engaged or “bought in” others will be. Think about it this way, the less time you take to decide, the more likely you are making the decision independently – and you run the risk of others not agreeing or understanding the decision. As you take the time to engage others, you may build commitment, but you are spending time.
There is the basic trade off . . . but this tool is designed give you more than a basic concept... it is meant to help you make conscious and effective choices about how to make decisions with and for your team . . . for the rest of your career.

So, given the basic curve above, what are the other considerations for us to take into account?

*How much team commitment is required?* If this is a decision that people will likely accept, whatever it is, it is probably fine to make an independent, unilateral decision. If you need more buy in – engage your team in the decision more and your odds of improved commitment will go up.

*How much impact will the decision have on people?* If the decision will have minor impact on people, a decision you make with less impact is likely to be fine. But as people feel more consequences from a decision, the more you might want to involve them. As a rule of thumb – involve the people who are more directly impacted by the decision.

*How much time is available?* If the situation is urgent (i.e. there is a fire in the building), we don’t likely need or want to gather for a meeting. On the other hand, the longer the time horizon, the more you might gain by engaging others.

*How many people are involved?* We all know that the larger the group, the longer a decision will take. Keep this in mind (and manage who you invite to the discussion) when thinking about your decision making strategy.

*Who has the information?* Do you have all of the needed information? If so, you may be fine to decide independently. But do people perceive they have information and perspectives you are missing? Or are you really missing information? If that is the case you at least need input before deciding, even if you don’t move further up the curve to strategies closer to true consensus decision making.

*How complex is the problem?* Relating to the information question above is the complexity consideration. The more complex the problem is, the more likely the input of others will lead to a better decision with greater levels of commitment.

*Importance of the decision?* How strategic is it? How lasting will the impacts of the decision last? These are important considerations too.

There is one more important point. All of the factors discussed are important to consider and will point you towards a better decision making strategy. But there is an over-riding factor that
you must consider as well. This factor, when holding all of the others constant has the ability to significantly change the slope of the line in our diagram.

**Trust.**

The more people trust you and trust each other, the less time you need to get higher levels of commitment. So the last and perhaps most important question to consider is . . .

How much do people trust you? The more they trust you the less time decisions will take and the more commitment and buy-in you will have.

What approach will yield the best decision? Ultimately this whole tool is meant to help you answer this question. Just remember that “best” includes more parameters than just an objective answer. Hopefully this document will help you redefine and clarify what “best” means in a given situation – and lead you to a more effective leadership approach in all situations.

**Your Now Steps**

1. Think about a decision you need to make, and consciously decide on your decision making process using the advice contained here – even if it isn’t your normal or standard approach.
2. Consult these thought processes regularly to make better decisions with higher levels of engagement and commitment.

**Additional Resources**

- For some additional thoughts and writing on decision making, check out this list of articles from my blog.
- As you have seen in this tool, trust a plays a big role in decision making speed. For another resource on developing trust within your team, check out this recording of a 60-minute teleseminar titled, Developing Trust In Your Team to Reduce Stress and Get More Done! And use promo code 20DAYS to receive a 20% discount.
About Kevin

Kevin Eikenberry is a world renowned leadership expert, a two-time bestselling author, speaker, consultant, trainer, coach, leader, learner, husband and father (not necessarily in that order).

Kevin is the Chief Potential Officer of The Kevin Eikenberry Group, a leadership and learning consulting company that has been helping organizations, teams and individuals reach their potential since 1993. Kevin’s specialties include leadership, teams and teamwork, organizational culture, facilitating change, organizational learning and more.

Kevin also is the creator and content developer of The Remarkable Leadership Learning System, a continual leadership development process based on his bestselling book, Remarkable Leadership: Unleashing Your Leadership Potential One Skill at a Time, and focused on developing the 13 competencies of remarkable leaders with virtually delivered content to leaders worldwide. He is also the developer of the Remarkable Leadership Workshop, the Coaching Training Camp and the co-developer of the Bud to Boss and Ultimate Communicator Workshops – all offered in both public and in-house versions across North America.