

A Decision-Making Address



Kathy Simons (WTS-LA Chapter President), Photo © John Livzey, 2017

In *The Wasteland*, T. S. Eliot's poetic crisis of conscious can be whittled down (arguably) to one line: "In a minute there is time for decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse." Think about that. Already burdened by indecision and insecurity, he's convinced that whatever he decides will be undone a minute later. We *all* know how that feels. Fortunately, most days go better than that. But he's got a point. We make a lot of decisions each day. From the mundane (Is the left lane moving faster?) to the sublime (Should I invest in Bitcoin?), we face many more decisions than we realize. In a sense, everything is a decision. And therein lies the problem.

When we make so many decisions each day—each hour—we can get trapped in a decision-making Faraday Cage. To make so many decisions efficiently, we can isolate ourselves from the greater consequences of those decisions. Everyone wants to be decisive. But decisiveness has a cost. Many of the decisions we make have consequences beyond the immediate decision itself. Those decisions affect others around us, both directly and indirectly. So, that means that we have power. We have power to change other people's lives through our decisions. If you're a business, agency, or organization leader, decision making carries even that much more weight. Of course, there are times where your decisions will not be popular. And that certainly makes things more difficult. It can make things quite lonely, in fact. What's a decision-maker to do?

First, remember that no one is infallible. Everyone makes bad decisions. Everyone makes flat-out wrong decisions. Bell bottoms? Chia pets? New Coke? Really. Ultimately, no matter how much time you take, no matter how well you consider the alternatives, no matter how carefully you weigh consequences, you will make bad decisions. So, with apologies to T. S. Eliot, forgive yourself. Take responsibility, but forgive yourself. Expect that you're going to get some decisions wrong. Prepare yourself for that. And prepare for the late-night/early-morning rumination that can accompany serious decisions that don't go as you had hoped. And after you've prepared for that, then think of decision making as a process.

Whether you have two steps or twenty, parse out the pros and cons, the upsides and the downsides, and the intended and, if possible, the unintended consequences. Write them down in two columns on a piece of paper. Open two Word files. Use 3 x 5 cards. Whatever works best for you. Do your best to do due diligence. Often, it's extremely helpful to reset the decision in a completely foreign or abnormal way. For example, if you've got to choose between two vendors, try to imagine what would happen if that particular service no longer existed? What would you do? How would you get done what you need to get done if that service was not there or was never invented? Sometimes, reframing a decision in an out-of-the-box way can help you see more clearly what is really there and what's best for you or your firm. And that leaves one final element for decision making.

I had a beautiful, but somewhat long-winded explanation for the next point, but Ralph Waldo Emerson said it better. So, I'm opting for brevity. Here's what he wrote, "Whatever course you decide upon, there is always someone to tell you that you are wrong. There are always difficulties arising which tempt you to believe that your critics are right. To map out a course of action and follow it to an end requires courage." Fortunately, courage is not a finite resource. But when we feel it's running low, that's the time to turn to people you trust. Once again, that's exactly where WTS-LA comes in. We trust each other. We support each other. And when we need courage to make a decision or sympathetic ears to review decision alternatives, WTS-LA members are always eager and happy to help. So, find your courage in the women of this chapter.

"In a minute there is time for decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse." It doesn't have to work that. Take more than a minute. Call on the women and men of WTS-LA to help you make important decisions that a minute will not reverse. Use the power of this chapter and its members to make you a better, more deliberate decision maker.

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