

Think through decisions

Recent research has found that your status influences your decisions. Employees at the highest and lowest rungs make the boldest decisions. That's because conformity is weakest at the extremes of a hierarchy—top execs may feel secure enough to take risks and peons figure they've got little to lose. Most folks in the middle cling to conventional behavior to preserve their status.

Where does that leave you? Make sound decisions with these steps:

- 1. List possible actions.** Write down every option, including doing nothing.
- 2. Assess the consequences.** Identify the upshot of each action. Consider its likely effects on you, your colleagues, customers and employees.
- 3. Set odds.** Estimate the probability that the consequences you listed above will flow from the actions you started with. Don't inflate or deflate your own skill or let other subjective issues taint your evaluation. Instead, reflect on past actions and outcomes in an unbiased frame of mind and compare the actions and consequences you're weighing now with what's happened before.
- 4. Factor in your emotions.** Here's the step many people skip. Determine how much you yearn for—or dread—certain consequences. Ask yourself to what extent wishful thinking, cynicism or pessimism is influencing you.

Practice these four steps and they'll become second nature. The best decision will often be the one with the best odds of success.

Avoid traps in decision making

Even if you follow the four main steps, these barriers can block you:

Hesitancy. As much as you may want to know everything before you do anything, that's impossible. Don't dally or let ambivalence immobilize you.

Listen to your gut. Pay attention to your instincts, but don't discount facts and others' input. Consider gut feelings alongside other variables to maintain a balanced perspective.