

# What Do You Think I Should Do?

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How many times have you heard that question? If you are respected for your decision making skills, you've likely had people ask that of you a lot.

As a leader dedicated to serving those you influence, I imagine you listen closely to understand the situation. You draw deeply from your experiences, searching for some wise perspective. Finally, you offer a suggestion that you expect will serve the individual well.

No, no, no! Don't allow your good intentions to seduce you into answering that question! There's a much better way, which I'll explain later.

First, let's explore how you and the person you are serving typically make decisions. Then you'll see a more empowering way to respond to this question, "What do you think I should do?"

**Situation.** Our choices usually begin with a situation that has presented itself. That's what probably caused the person to come to you, seeking your advice. After explaining the situation he or she faces, the individual seeks your wisdom for "the best response."

**Option generation.** With some situations, we just respond habitually. Or we respond with what we've been told "should" be done. However, there are always multiple options. I learned this the hard way early in my career.

I was the Safety Manager for a plant of about 300 employees. I was touring the Plant Manager, and I was telling him about the safety promotion we had scheduled for next month. He was courteous and listened fully to my explanation. Then he calmly commented, "I understand your plan. What were the other four options you considered and rejected in favor of this one?"

I was stunned. He didn't reject my plan. He didn't criticize my plan. Actually, I don't remember if he liked my plan or not. I just knew I had considered no other alternative, and I was sure he knew it, too. I was embarrassed by having no answer to his question. I stammered. Somehow, I got out of the conversation, but I've never forgotten the lesson.

Since then, any time I've had the opportunity to influence others, I've pointed out that there are at least five possible ways in which we can respond to any situation! In fact, if someone asks me, "What could I have done differently in that situation?" I'll work hard to come up with at least five suggestions.

**Option selection.** Obviously, a decision has to be made if progress is going to occur. How do you choose from among the five (or more) options you've generated? Great question, but first let me complete the model.

Note that you've not actually done anything yet. Everything has been mental. Every decision is made twice—first mentally, then physically. Doing the mental work well helps ensure that the implementation of the decision goes well, too.

**Behavior.** Ah, this is where the decision is actually executed. Most people won't know what preceded this step; they'll just experience the action you choose to take. They won't know your desired outcome or your motive. They will know, however, the effect of your behavior. And that result could be quite different from what you had hoped it would be!

When you face a situation, you are in control of the ideas you generate, the specific option you select, and the action you take. In fact, this decision-making process is about the only thing in life that you totally control! You certainly aren't in control of the outcome of your action. There are many other factors that may drastically change what you had anticipated into something very different!

**Short-term outcome.** Usually, there's some immediate result of the action you've taken. And it often leads to some rather quick satisfaction or disappointment.

**Long-term outcome.** Ah, but there's always a longer-term effect. Just ask any dieter who splurges on cake, ice cream, or in my case, potato chips! There are certain immutable laws that just can't be violated. Those laws are always in effect. You can't revoke them, overlook them, or wish them away.

So let me ask a couple of questions about this model. Which do you think we human beings focus on more strongly, option generation or option selection? And which do you think we humans consider more when we make a decision, the short-term outcomes or the long-term outcomes?

Well, I've reached my article length limit for this week. I'll let you consider those questions until next week when I'll share my thoughts. And I'll also answer that question about how we select our option from among those five or more ideas we generated.

Just for the fun of it, as you go through the week, pay attention to your situations, the possibilities for responding to each of them, the choices you make, and your skill in executing them. And then pay attention to both the short-term and long-term outcomes. I look forward to comparing notes next week!

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