

Want to make better decisions? Take this advice.

How can you become faster at making decisions? Brothers and best-selling business authors Chip and Dan Heath offer some really simple advice. If you are trying to make a decision in a business setting, ask yourself: “If I was replaced tomorrow and a wise successor took my place, what would he or she do?”

The Heaths say something profound happens when you see your dilemma from the outside like that.

Similarly, if you are struggling with a personal decision, they suggest asking yourself: “What would I tell my best friend to do?”

The Heaths’ most recent book is “Decisive: How to Make Better Choices in Life and Work.” They’ve also authored “Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die” and “Switch: How to Change Things When Change Is Hard.”

With regard to decision making, this brother duo also advises researching several options first. If you are buying a new laptop, look at three to five alternatives. Adding options makes you more honest about how you assess them, they say. They explain that if you are only evaluating one candidate for a job, or one vehicle that you may buy, human nature is to rationalize away the negatives because you want that choice to work out. In contrast, if you compare two or three options, you will be more honest about the pros and cons.

Another tactic that the Heath brothers promote is doing a “premortem” — a process attributed to psychologist Gary Klein. To do this, you and your team imagine that you just made a decision — and then you envision a year has gone by and the decision turned out to be a disaster. From this exercise, you analyze what went wrong — hypothetically, of course.

Based on those possible disaster scenarios, you then work to ensure those outcomes do not occur in the real world.

Speaking of failure

And what happens if you do fail? Hopefully, you’ve heard the expression that “experience is the name we give to our mistakes.” Indeed, failure can be a wonderful teacher — if you allow yourself to really analyze what went wrong or what could have been done differently.

In a recent article about Arianna Huffington, co-founder and editor of the online *Huffington Post* news site, she pointed out, “There’s absolutely no one who’s succeeded who has not failed along the way.”

She added, “My mother used to call failure a stepping stone to success, as opposed to the opposite of success.”

Huffington also shared a story about Steve Jobs who said being fired from Apple was the best thing that ever happened to him. He said, “The heaviness of being successful was replaced by the lightness of being a beginner again, less sure about everything.”

To that, Huffington notes that success often generates fear — and stops people because they are afraid to step out of their comfort zones and risk failure.

Don’t let that happen — forge ahead and take risks. Whether you are successful, or fail, you’ll learn from the experience.

Build a team

Whether they realize it or not, leaders have a dual role — foremost is their job as a visionary, setting the future direction and plans for the business. But perhaps equally important, suggest many human resource and business experts, is the

leader’s role as a “motivator” and “inspiration” to the employees.

You may have the best strategic plan and vision in the world, but without the commitment and support of your employees, that vision will likely not get off the shelf, and success for your business or organization will be an uphill battle.

Employees want to be part of the team; they want to understand the vision and mission of the business; they want to have a clear, written description of their jobs; and they want feedback as to how they and the business are performing.

As a leader, are you taking time to offer regular feedback to your employees or team members so they can continually improve their job performance? Do you recognize that feedback should be a balance of both positive and negative comments?

UCLA basketball coach John Wooden understood this approach. He kept diaries and noted improvement of each player during practice. Wooden then shared that feedback with players at the end of each practice.

This feedback took 15-30 minutes extra, but it was important to Wooden as a coach, and the results showed. Wooden and his team earned 10 NCAA titles.

Sharing feedback with your employees — making them part of the team — could very well make your operation more productive.

Respected business guru and former General Electric CEO Jack Welch understood this principle as well. His sage advice is quite simple, but many who are in leadership roles tend to forget this perspective. Here is what Welch summed up so nicely: “Before you are a leader, success is all about growing yourself. When you become a leader, success is all about growing others.” **HW**