

STEPS TO EFFECTIVE DECISION-MAKING

WORKSHEET

We all make countless decisions each day, from deciding what to eat or wear to figuring out how to spend our free time or disposable income. Many of these decisions require little effort or thought, but at times, we face circumstances that require more consideration. The following steps provide a framework with which to contemplate such complicated and difficult decisions.

- 1 PINPOINT** what needs to be decided. Remember that if you don't have at least two possible options, there is no decision to be made.
- 2 IDENTIFY** all possible courses of action. This is purely a brainstorming session, so write down every alternative that comes to mind without stopping to consider the feasibility of each option. Consider seeking additional information from family, friends, the Internet, or professionals to expand the number of potential alternatives.
- 3 LIST** the pros and cons of each alternative, considering your own values and priorities (economic, personal, social). Cross out options that you don't feel comfortable with, are infeasible, or contradict your values and priorities. This process should help you narrow down the list of possibilities.
- 4 EXAMINE** the remaining options. Consider the outcomes of each alternative. Does the option excite you, but the potential outcome make you uneasy? It is important to feel comfortable with both the alternative and the outcome.
- 5 MAKE YOUR CHOICE** and take action. Keep in mind that the resulting solution should solve the dilemma, be satisfying, and not create more problems. You should also be committed to this solution.
- 6 EVALUATE** the outcome. Remember that there is a difference between a good decision and a good outcome. Even if you did not reach the anticipated outcome, you quite possibly still made the best decision based on your values and priorities. Decision-making is a lifelong process and taking the time to learn from each outcome will provide you with valuable lessons that can be used the next time around.

COMMON PITFALLS

- **Identifying the wrong problem.** Sometimes what really needs to be decided is very obvious, but other times the issue is harder to spot. For example, let's say your friend blew off a study session with you to hang out with other friends. Is the problem that you are hurt by your friend's actions or that you are worried about his study habits? Figuring out the focus of your decision can save you from big headaches later on.
- **Listening to only one source.** This will hurt your chances of coming up with a broad choice of alternatives and coming up with the best solution. Overestimating how helpful or reliable one person can be is also dangerous, because nobody can completely understand the particular dynamics of your situation.
- **Listening to too many sources.** It is important to collect as much information as possible to help you make your decision, but an overload of input may prevent you from following your gut instinct. Trusting your intuition is a key component of successful decision-making.
- **Overshooting on the outcome.** When considering your options, take care to also assess how probable the outcomes of each option truly are. A decision that looks attractive but is totally unfeasible will not help you solve the problem.
- **Bad timing.** Sometimes it's best to hold off on making a decision, but other times delaying a response can make things a lot worse. Taking your time will probably result in a higher-quality decision, but expediting the process could also give you more time to fix things in the event of an undesirable outcome. Since each choice is often case-specific, consider how the pros and cons of timing will affect your decision and the ensuing outcome.