

PROCTOR

July 2014 – Vol.34 No.6



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Making the 'right' decision is stressful, especially when you're deciding on important matters and the decisions come one after the other. **Jonathan Chan** explains the relationship between mental toughness and decision-making, and provides useful strategies to help the process.

Decision-making can be a lonely business.

Making an important decision will draw on your mental, emotional and physical reserves. If the decision is complex, will impact others, or even change lives, it is especially draining.

Making the 'right' decisions – or even 'good enough' decisions in a rush – is certain to sap your energy if it goes on day after day. Ultimately, your decisions define you, what you stand for, and what you are willing to accept or tolerate.

When we look at decision-making from the perspective of psychology and performance science, it helps to revisit the concept of 'mental toughness'¹ and that of 'attention regulation'.

Looking at the research, particularly the insights of Dr Daniel Gucciardi,² it is clear that in areas such as elite sport, the military, healthcare, emergency services and the corporate boardroom, mental toughness is an important factor in high performance.

'Attention regulation' – or maintaining concentration – is a contributing factor to mental toughness as it has an enabling effect on both physical and mental capacity.

To help you not only make the 'right' decision but the right decision *for you*, here are three quick strategies that can help to strengthen your ability to regulate your attention and maintain focus.



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1. Clarify purpose

With decision-making, we often fall into the trap of becoming caught up in the detail. The analogy of not seeing the forest for the trees rings true here. When reviewing a decision, it helps to return to an independent reference-point. Consider these questions:

Organisational:

- What is the purpose of our organisation (or team)?
- If our organisation (or team) and I achieve our organisational purpose, what might people say about the legacy we have created in 10, 20 or 50 years' time?
- What outcome are we hoping to achieve now? Why?
- Is this aligned with the bigger picture of our organisation?
- Are we willing to accept the consequences of our decision?

Individual:

- What gives me meaning in my life?
- What do I stand for? Why is this important for me?
- What are the consequences?
- Can I live with my decision and the associated consequences I have actively chosen to make?

2. Get connected emotionally

Decision-making is traditionally based on the analysis of data, but have you considered that what you experience emotionally is actually a good personal source of information? Take a moment to reflect on your emotions and consider why you might be feeling the way that you are feeling.

You might be anxious, or feeling that 'something isn't right'. Why? Is there a critical risk associated with the decision? What could help in managing this risk – a Plan B, clarifying specific information, reflecting on the purpose, or taking time for review?

Take a moment to make room for and process your internal experience. Sit with your emotions and don't ignore them. Your personal emotional information is often a great moral compass for navigating the journey ahead.

3. Mindful or mind-full?

Mindfulness is the practice of bringing yourself back to the present moment without judgment. Take a moment to reset yourself so your mind isn't 'full'.

This could be by taking a couple of deep, purposeful breaths and grounding yourself, a moment of meditation, or doing what you do to bring yourself back into the room rather than dwelling on the past or future.

Sometimes you just need to reset your batteries so your mind isn't busy – somewhat like rebooting your laptop when it starts to lag because too much is going on and the hardware just isn't keeping up.

Often it's best to slow down, gather yourself, gain clarity and then make a decision. A rushed action without purposeful decision-making has its own set of consequences. Know what's important!

Next page: Mindfulness – just think about it

Jonathan Chan is a performance and positive psychologist who specialises in leadership, mental toughness and positive psychology. At the time of writing, he was a senior consultant with the Queensland Law Society LawCare service provider, Assure Programs.

Notes

¹ 'Mental toughness' can be described as a reservoir of critical personal assets that enables individuals to maintain high performance. See the November 2013 edition of *Proctor* for a detailed explanation.

² Dr Daniel Gucciardi is an internationally renowned authority on mental toughness. He has personally shared his scientific psychological profiling and developmental expertise with the author for consultancy associated with individual and organisational capability enhancement and talent management.