



**THE**  
**LEADERSHIP**  
**CRUCIBLE**

**Where Great Leaders Are Forged**

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## The Importance of Motivation and Accountability in Decision Making

Decision making happens many times each day in our lives, and we often don't think about the process we use to make those decisions. While many are inconsequential, others can have significant impact on our lives. I am sure you have found yourself on many occasions struggling with a decision you have had to make. You go back and forth, exploring all the different angles of a choice and its impact, and yet, you often end up making the wrong choice. When making a decision, we form opinions and choose actions via mental processes which are influenced by biases, reason, emotions, and memories. At times, that can lead us to make the wrong choices.

I know that to be true from experience when I purchased a couple of vehicles. But what about from a leadership perspective? To make good decisions, one must think critically without succumbing to emotions and biases that can influence the decision process. This means not just following your gut but determining what knowledge you lack and obtaining it before making a decision. When you look at all the possible sources of information with an open mind, you make better decisions because you are informed, and your decisions are based on facts rather than emotion or intuition.

Having worked in local government for many years, I often found it interesting how the decision process worked or didn't. I found that often decisions were made not based upon what was best for the people that were being represented but what was best for the elected official-either to get re-elected or to lessen the negative feedback they would receive from making the right decision.

We just had a great example of the decision process in action with the dialogue and ultimate passage of the federal budget-debt ceiling limit. Not the greatest example of effective decision making by any stretch of the imagination, but it provides the basis for discussion on how organizations, whether public or private, often make decisions. I've given a lot of thought to the decision process we see take place in both the public and private sector. So often we see decisions being made, that at the time, were known to be wrong, would not address the problem, and were not the best decision for the organization or the people they were serving.



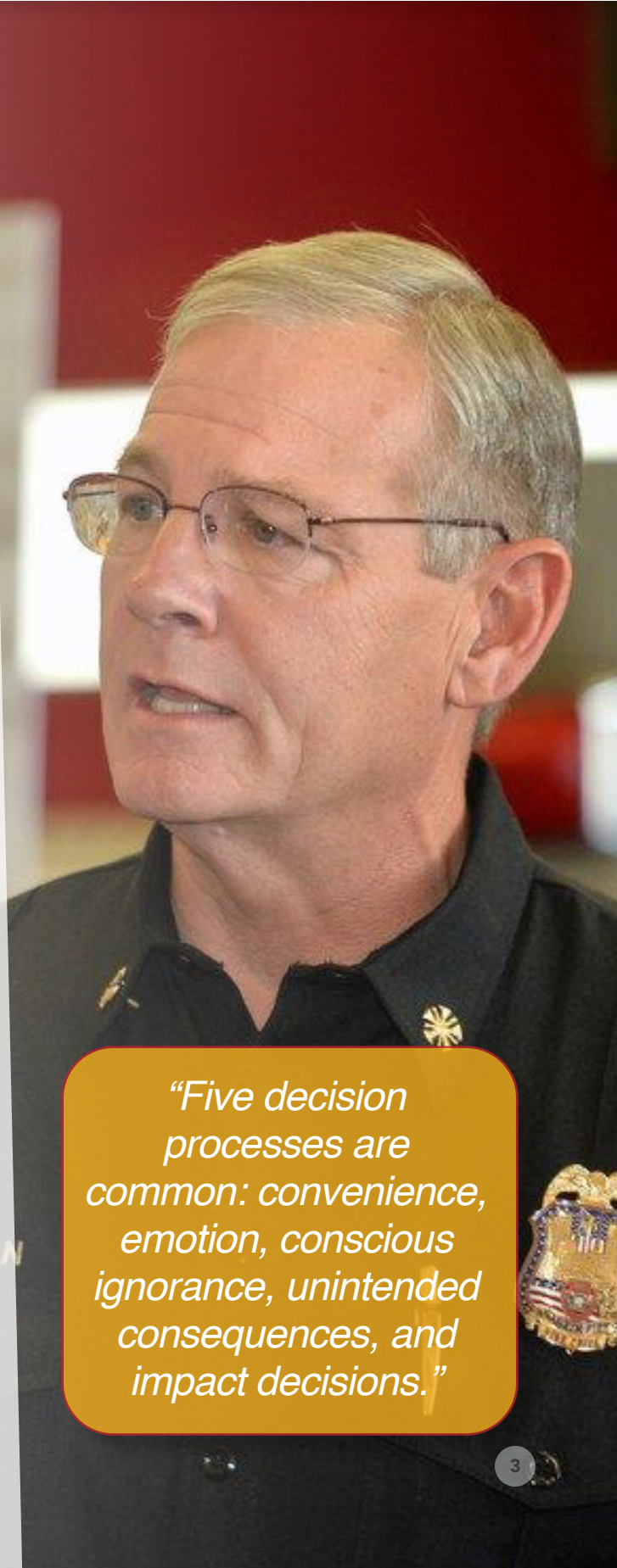
Yet those decisions were still made. As we have seen on many occasions, such decisions have led to companies going bankrupt, government funded programs to be ineffective, poor services to be delivered, and increased cost and debt. Why does that happen? I think it comes down to the motivation and accountability of leadership who's responsibility it is to make those decisions. From my experience, five decision processes are common: convenience, emotion, conscious ignorance, unintended consequences, and impact decisions. Lets explore each.

### The Decisions of Convenience

I have witnessed decisions of convenience on many occasions in local government, and I am sure you have seen them in your profession as well. These are decisions made for the convenience of the leader who is making them, even though they may be the wrong decision for the organization, a division within a company, an individual unit, or even the country. The motivation for a decision of convenience is when a leader is trying to thread the needle and not take decisive action that could upset an important constituency. In local government, we often see this occur when a decision involves local developers, labor groups, or other large funding donors to elected officials. And at the federal level, it is often who is "bringing the bank" and the endorsements for the next election. In the corporate world, that constituency may be the Board of Directors, the CEO, or someone you report to.

No matter what type of organization you work in, you will find decisions of convenience being made, and at times, they can be appropriate. There are times when the fallout from a decision organizationally is not worth making. I have fallen victim to this on a few occasions when I made a decision that was right, only to have significant disagreements on issues that were of little importance. One has to pick one's battles. As a leader, when making a decision of convenience, one has to maintain accountability to one's organization.

So often, we see leaders who make a decision of convenience and disregard their responsibility to uphold the trust and obligation they have of their position. That is when bad decisions are made for the people that you are serving and when your integrity is lost as a leader.



*“Five decision processes are common: convenience, emotion, conscious ignorance, unintended consequences, and impact decisions.”*



*“Decisions of emotion often cause us to use the Ready, Fire, Aim approach.”*

### **Decisions of Emotion**

If you are in a leadership position, you have probably received a call from one of your direct reports that went something like this: “Hi Boss. Hey, I just wanted to let you know that one of our drivers just ran over a parked car. Everyone is ok, the car is totaled, and the grand piano we were delivering fell over in the truck.” I am sure you can place your own story into this scenario. We all have several. What was your initial reaction when you received your call? Decisions of emotions are extremely fast in comparison to taking your time to gather the facts and take a more rational approach.

While they can be useful if one is in immediate danger, or in decisions of minimal significance, they can get you into trouble when reacting immediately to issues of greater importance. When you get that email from an employee who is explaining to you how a decision you made is the “stupidest one, ever!!” Do you immediately write back, or do you immediately write and hold sending it while you think it over for 24 hours until you decide to send it or address the manner in another way? The latter is preferable. Decisions of emotion often cause us to use the Ready, Fire, Aim approach. I have learned, the hard way, that this approach is not a desirable choice, and you never hit the target for which you are aiming.

While emotions play an important role in decision making, it is your emotional intelligence that helps you to understand and use them effectively to make good decisions. Emotions and decision making are an inevitable part of each other, and understanding how your emotions affect decision making can help you make better decisions. Here are some strategies to make the most of your emotional and rational thought processes.

- Time is on your side. Unless it is a dangerous situation, make yourself wait to react, to form an opinion or judgment. It provides you with time for your emotions to settle, and for you to gather more information.
- Develop your decision process. When faced with having to make a difficult decision, it is helpful if you have developed a process by which you will evaluate all of the information before making a decision.
- Unassociated emotions can influence your decisions. Be cognizant that your own emotional state, or a previously poor experience with a person or company can influence or create biases in your decision process. Emotions can play a significant role in fairness related to a decision making process.



- Good decisions require your head and your heart. The head represents our logical and analytical side, our cognition, where we process information, analyze data, and weigh the pros and cons of a situation. It is what guides us with rationality and practicality. However, decision-making based solely on logic and analysis can sometimes lead to narrow perspectives. The heart represents our emotional and intuitive side where we process our values, emotions, and inner wisdom. It is the source of our intuition and gut feelings. The heart is what connects us to our deeper purpose and sense of what is right and wrong. I have found that when you listen to your gut, follow your heart, and use your head, you're more likely to make good decisions.

### **Decisions of Conscious Ignorance** **The Cobra Effect: Decisions of Unintended Consequences**


There are times when you are in a leadership position and you make a decision that you thought was the best course of action, only to determine later that it produced unintended result.

There is a famous anecdote called the Cobra Effect. This is when an attempted solution results in unintended consequences. The term "Cobra Effect" originated during the time of the British rule of colonial India. At the time, Delhi was experiencing a proliferation of venomous cobras inhabiting the city, creating an extreme safety hazard for the residents.

The government's strategy was to offer a bounty for every dead cobra. Creating this incentive was initially a successful strategy—many rewards were claimed, and the number of cobra snakes spotted in Delhi started to decrease. However, the number of dead cobra snakes presented to the bounty office for the reward kept on rising. Why?


Well, it was found that enterprising people had started breeding cobra snakes to get the bounty. The government became aware of the scheme, and stopped offering the reward for dead cobra snakes. As a result, the cobra breeders set the now worthless reptiles free, resulting in an increase in the cobra population in Delhi, an unintended consequence.

Today, we are experiencing another classic example of this in the wildfires that are being experienced in the U.S. While climate change may be a contributing factor today, it has been the decisions that have been made over the past 50 years that are the main reasons for the increase and severity of these type of fires.

A close-up photograph of a hand holding a gold chess piece, likely a king or queen, over a chessboard. The background is blurred, showing other chess pieces and a warm, bokeh light effect.

*“Understanding how your emotions affect decision making can help you make better decisions.”*





*“To make a difference ... you must look to the root cause of why something is happening in the first*

Decisions such as allowing increased building and development in the wildland-urban interface by state and local governments, the environmental movement that has pressured the government to enact legislation that has limited the use of effective forest management practices such as prescribed burns and removal of dead trees, investment in adequate fire breaks and other protection features that minimize fire spread, the decision by power companies not to bury their power lines.

All of these policies, collectively, have led to these catastrophic fires. This is a classic example of unintended consequences as a result of the policies that have been enacted, legislation that has been passed, or lack thereof, and political pressures, all of which have contributed to what we are experiencing today, catastrophic wildfires every year.

### **Decisions of Impact**

From a leader’s perspective, if you want to make a decision that is going to make a difference for the problem you are trying to solve, you must look to the root cause of why something is happening in the first place. We often see, especially in government, the recognition that a problem exists, and legislative actions are taken to fix the issue while never addressing the cause of why something is happening in the first place. So a new program is funded, a bureaucracy is created to support it, and a decade later, the same problem still exists; and, in many cases, the issue has gotten worse.

There are many examples of this today in our society where billions of dollars are being spent, and yet the problems continue to increase; the homeless issue, fentanyl crisis, generational welfare, and the lack of affordable educational and technical training pathways for people are just a few examples. You likely see this in your own organization when decisions are made, a policy is implemented, or a new strategy is undertaken to remedy an issue, and a year later, the same problem exists.

A great example of a decision of impact that saved lives was the decision by the Food and Drug Administration to authorize the Pfizer vaccine for emergency use in just under a year after Covid-19 was identified. Typically the approval process runs between 5-10 years for a new vaccine. The urgency of the situation pushed aside the usual bureaucratic systems and financial concerns for the development of vaccines.



It also innovated the testing processes, vaccine manufacturing, and clinical trials were carried out simultaneously, and advances in data recording and social media made it easier to recruit trial participants.

Just think what would have happened if they had stuck to their established process to approve the new vaccine! We still would not have a vaccine. This is an important lesson on decisions of impact. Urgency, focused efforts, and a collective commitment to a common goal made this happen quickly. Look at the difference it has made!

Just think if we took that same approach on the significant issues facing society today and issues within our organizations. We could make a positive difference in the lives of many. We already know what it takes to do that. Leadership that has the right motivation in the decision process and is accountable for the results.

## Readers Are Leaders

I believe in order to be a good leader one must be on a continuous quest to gain more knowledge. The leadership benefits of reading are wide-ranging. Evidence suggests reading can improve intelligence and lead to innovation and insight. John Coleman's article in the Harvard Business Review, *For Those Who Want To Lead, Read*, highlights the leadership benefits of reading are wide-ranging.

Reading can improve intelligence and lead to innovation and insight. For example, some studies have shown that reading makes you smarter through "a larger vocabulary and more world knowledge in addition to abstract reasoning skills." To that end, we provide a few suggested titles below for you to consider:

### **Aftermath: The Unintended Consequences of Public Policies**

Thomas E. Hall

### **Willful Blindness, Why We Ignore the Obvious at Our Own Peril**

Margaret Heffernan

### **Thinking, Fast and Slow**

Daniel Kahneman

### **How to Decide,**

Annie Duke





## Chief B's Key Leadership Takeaways

Having the honor of speaking to great leaders in their profession in The Leadership Crucible Podcast, we make notes on the key leadership takeaways discussed. We share the leadership takeaways with you in hopes it will help you reflect on your own leadership style and also provide potential talking points that you can discuss with your team. Doing so is a great way to better understand your teams, gain perspective on topics, and gain a deeper understanding of how individual team members think. It is an excellent way to build your team.

- 🔥 When making a decision, we form opinions and choose actions via mental processes that are influenced by our biases, reason, our emotions, and memories.
- 🔥 Decisions of convenience are made for the comfort of the leader who is making them, even though they may be the wrong decision for the organization and the people they are serving.
- 🔥 In making a decision of convenience leaders often set aside their responsibility to be accountable, and that is when their integrity as a leader is lost or comes into question.
- 🔥 Decisions of emotion often cause us to use the Ready, Fire, Aim approach. The end result is usually not effective or desirable.
- 🔥 The concept of unintended consequences is that decisions and subsequent actions of people, organizations, or government can produce results or impacts that were not the original intent of the actions that were taken.
- 🔥 Decisions of impact focus on the root cause of an issue to address it.
- 🔥 Decisions of impact require a sense of urgency, focused efforts, and a collective commitment to a common goal.
- 🔥 We make a positive difference in the lives of others when we have the right motivation in our decision process and have accountability for their results.
- 🔥 When you listen to your gut, follow your heart, and use your head, you're more likely to make good decisions.

