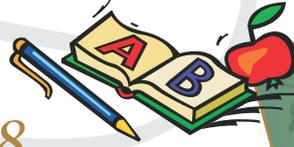


# Quality Education News

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Dear Supporter of Quality Education

## Making the right decisions

*It is the business of the benevolent man to seek what is beneficial to the world and to eliminate what is harmful.*

*Mozi, ancient Chinese philosopher*



Professor Joseph Badaracco teaches Business Ethics at Harvard Business School. He makes the point with his students that every leader and manager is challenged to make tough decisions.

Whatever our position might be in the school system, we daily make decisions that impact on others. Over time we get a reputation as to whether or not our decision-making ability is good or bad. How do we make the right call? How do we make the wise judgement?

In his training of MBA students and his counselling sessions with leaders, Badaracco proffers five questions that can guide the decision-maker. The five questions have guided leaders through the centuries. They are:

### 1 What are the consequences of all my options?

The leader isn't the only person looking at the consequences of any decision. Get input from those folk who can give advice and are the experts. Ask yourself as well as them this core question: "What *could* we do? And who will be hurt or helped, short-term and long-term by each option?"

Every quality school has a set of values that underpin the decision-making process. Such values could be, for example, compassion, fairness and openness. The final decision that the leader makes should be based on those core values. Decisions taken impact on the lives of others.

### 2 What are my core obligations?

Imagine the situation of a teacher who is underperforming in the classroom. On the one side she is desperate to hold on to the post because she's a single parent breadwinner with three young children. On the opposite side is a large group of children who aren't being taught properly and risk failing exams. What value, for example, gets greater emphasis in this scenario? Is it compassion or fairness?

When confronted with such tough choices, philosophers refer to "moral imagination." The decision-maker has to step out of one's

comfort zone acknowledging personal biases and "blind spots". One has to think of the rights of all the stakeholders especially the most vulnerable. When making the decision, it's to ask which duty stands first. In the situation described, is it the single parent mother or the children being taught in the classroom?

### 3 What will work in the world as it is?

Not everybody is able to always play to the rules of even-handedness, honesty and integrity. There are times when the leader has to be pragmatic when making choices. There's a need to understand the world as it really is rather than an idealised one. In a way, the leader will – at times – need to be a political animal. Compromise could be part of the decision-making process.

This does not mean discarding one's values. It does mean being prepared to being agile and opportunistic. Sometimes it's better to stay silent if there's a likelihood of a better long-term outcome.

### 4 Who are we?

Yes, the leader does need to adapt to the realities of the ever-evolving world in which we live but not uncritically and totally.

No classroom nor school is identical to any other in the world. Each is unique. When tough decisions have to be made, you need to accept this fact. Make decisions on the values, norms and relationships that are important in the class or school that you lead.

Maintain your unique identity. Over time a school develops its' own history. There's an understanding around the notion of, "It's the way we normally do things here." This is not a licence to be rigid or unchanging. Yet it does mean that the decision maker is respectful of the social relationships that have built up through the years in the school community.

### 5 What can we live with?

Good judgement, according to Badaracco, relies on two things:

- Best possible understanding and analysis of the situation
- Involving one's experiences, ideals, values and vulnerabilities

Making good decisions involves using **both** your head and your heart. One leader quite earthily but powerfully described it thus, "I have to get my brain and my gut-feel into gear."

Every day, we're called on to make leadership decisions. Some of those decisions will be easy; others will be tough. The five questions set by Badaracco will – if answered with honest reflection – guide us towards good decisions. Those that we lead will benefit from our sound judgement.

Sincerely

*Richard Hayward*

#### Reference

Badaracco, J. L., 2017. How to tackle your toughest decisions. *Harvard Business Review OnPoint*. Fall 2017, pages 119-123.

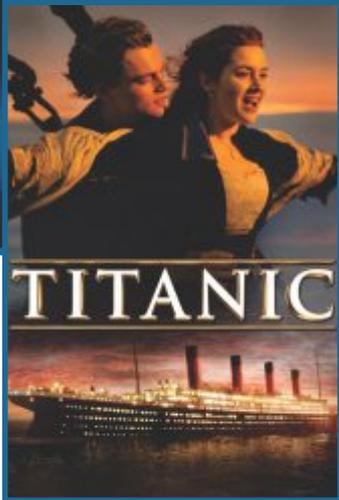


This newsletter is edited by SAQI and distributed to those schools benefiting from their participation in the MySchool programme. MySchool acts as a conduit which raises and delivers essential funding for education and social development on a sustainable basis. This enables members of the community to participate in the future development of our nation.



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EVERY SWIPE COUNTS

# Brainstorm better



If you saw the movie *Titanic* or have read about this 1912 sea tragedy, you'd have been aware of the unnecessary loss of life. The unthinkable happened on that night. The ship that was proudly

advertised as unsinkable, sank a few hours after colliding with an iceberg in the icy Atlantic Ocean. There were 2,200 on board but only 705 were rescued. In the more than a hundred years since the sinking, there have been historians, researchers and shipbuilders who've asked an important question. Could more lives have been saved?

The answer is: Yes, very likely.

Professor Tom McCaffrey and Jim Pearson work at Innovator Accelerator, a Massachusetts, USA company. In an article (McCaffrey: 2017), the authors maintain that rigid thinking or "functional fixedness" could have been a cause of unnecessary loss of life on the Titanic. The crew understandably saw the iceberg as the cause of the disaster but didn't see it also as a possible life-saving solution.

The iceberg rose high above the water and was four hundred feet in length. McCaffrey and Pearson theorise that lifeboats could have ferried people to the iceberg to see if there was a flat space for people to scramble on. This argument isn't fantasy. About 60 years before, 127 of 176 passengers on board a ship that sank in the Gulf of St Lawrence were saved by climbing onto an ice floe.

When decisions have to be made, too often there's a tunnel vision approach to finding solutions. The focus is too narrow. There's a lack of out-of-the-box thinking.

The *Titanic* crew's main focus was to put as many people as possible into the too-few sixteen lifeboats. Yet the goal could have been broadened. The captain and crew knew that ships in the vicinity were a number of hours away. For those unable to be put into lifeboats and who would have to wait until rescue ships arrived, there were alternatives. Keep people warm and breathing as well as out of the freezing water so as to avoid death from hypothermia.

According to McCaffrey and Pearson, there were other ways besides using the iceberg to save lives. It was estimated that there were about 40 cars on board the ship. That's 160 tyres and spare ones as well as inner tubes. Wooden tables, doors and

planks could have been tied to those tyres to create platforms. Tying rubber tyres and inner tubes together could have helped build rafts.

As we know, hindsight is a perfect science. Yet those additional actions if carried out, could possibly have saved more lives.

Brainstorming is a familiar technique that's used to help make decisions. People discuss and share ideas on how to solve a problem. Yet there can be unintended outcomes that can weaken the decision-making process. They include:

- Talkative personalities can dominate discussions.
- Solutions put forward can sometimes not be the best ones.
- Not all ideas are put forward.
- Certain people think best when allowed to work on their own.

To avoid some of these common pitfalls of "brainstorming", McCaffrey suggests starting the process with "brainstorming." People are encouraged to first work silently on their own. Solitary thinking precedes group talking.

## Silence is a sound starter

The group members work initially in silence. Each member writes personal contributions on either pieces of paper or sticky notes. The benefits of starting with a time for silence according to McCaffrey include:

- ✓ The talkative few don't dominate the session.
- ✓ People work in parallel so ideas are generated faster.
- ✓ Fear of judgement from the boss or colleagues is reduced.
- ✓ Top-down (big-picture) thinkers can work side-by-side with bottom-up (detail-oriented) thinkers.
- ✓ Ideas can be concise especially if they're written on sticky notes.

## Reference

McCaffrey, T & Pearson, J 2017. Find innovation where you least expect it. *Harvard Business Review OnPoint*. Fall 2017, pages 103 -109.



# Let others solve your problems for you!

Successful leaders understand that true power comes not from exercising control but from empowering others.

Jesse Lyn Stoner

## ENCOURAGE & EMPOWER

Once upon a time being a teacher was more likely to be much simpler. Imagine someone who was a pupil or teacher (maybe yourself!) fifty or more years ago. A single example is the teaching methodology of those bygone days. "Talk, chalk and charts on the walls" were likely to be deemed sufficient. In our 21<sup>st</sup> century world, teachers of today are expected to be able use cell phones, computers, Google, PowerPoints, smartboards and the like in the classroom.

Today's classroom and school are places of complexity and in many cases, quick action. Much can happen – and often does – every day. Decisions have to be made speedily and they need to reflect sound judgement.

In former far-off days, decisions were largely made by the all-knowing and wise teacher or principal. Deferential unquestioning acceptance usually followed their pronouncements.

It's unfair to expect any teacher or senior management team member to have all the right answers. There needs to be – according to Yves Morieux (2017: 76) – a set of "smart rules" which reduces the personal decision-making and responsibility from that one person. Decisions should preferably be made on the basis of individuals working together to find solutions.

Morieux describes two broad categories of rules: *enabling* and *impelling*. Each category has three smart rules. The enabling rules help give the information needed before a decision is taken. It also involves, "empowering the right people to make good choices." Impelling rules motivate people to give of their best as well as cooperate with others. This includes them being personally accountable.

### Three enabling smart rules

The first enabling smart rule is that everyone understands what work is done by colleagues. What do they do? What are their areas of expertise? What are their responsibilities? Don't load everything that needs to be done on to your shoulders. Let them share the load too.

In most schools, there are those who coordinate input around a particular problem or issue. Often it's a Head of Department, Subject (Learning Area) Head or a Deputy Principal. This is where the second enabling smart rule is used. Empower such individuals to make the decisions. Allow them to use their initiative.

The third enabling smart rule is closely linked to the previous one. Expand the power given to others. Devolve power.

Yes, top management in a school is finally answerable to decisions taken and even more so when it's a poor one. Believe in the ability of others to use their initiative and common sense. A staff has a wide range of skills. Allow the knowledge experts and those with the necessary experience to guide their colleagues. Not being in a senior management position does not preclude a person from leading those in higher level positions.

### Rules for getting to good end results

1. Improve understanding of what colleagues do.
2. Empower team leaders to make decisions.
3. Expand the power and trust given to others.
4. Increase the reciprocity expected of everyone.
5. Let everyone feel the shadow of the future.
6. Deal with the un-cooperatives.

### Impelling smart rules

Too often schools operate in silos. Each department sees itself as a stand-alone and feels that whatever happens elsewhere is not of their concern. The first impelling smart rule rejects that mind frame. There's increased reciprocity expected of everyone. We all have a part to play and are responsible for achieving agreed-on goals or targets.

One particular primary school was faced with the problem of falling enrolments and very few applications for the next year. The principal made the entire staff aware of the situation by using the impelling smart rule mentioned in the previous paragraph.

The same principal also used the second impelling smart rule. This rule is to make the staff feel the shadow of the future.

Again, it happens too often that staff can dump the problem on to the person who's ultimately seen as being responsible for finding a solution. Such thinking is skewed: everyone has a part to play. The principal gave the staff a fortnightly update on the enrolment figures for every Grade in the school. Staff became acutely aware of the positive impact on staff retentions if the enrolment figures went up. They were also made aware of the outcome s if enrolment figures dropped. Levels of cooperation amongst staff increased as well as commitment to the teaching and extramural programme.

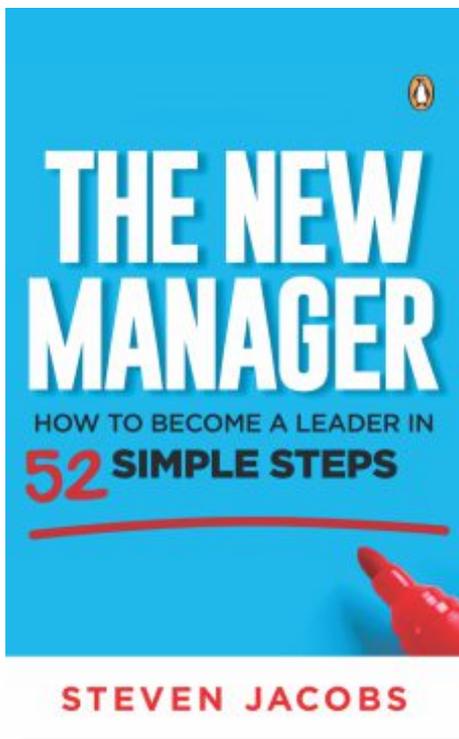
Not everyone "plays ball" when decisions have been taken. This is when the third impelling smart rule is used. The un-cooperatives needs to be told that they're "dropping the ball." This rule involves straight talking but also empathic listening. Under-performance by a staff member usually is symptomatic of a number of factors in which the school might be able to help resolve. Sometimes the school is at fault.

These six smart rules create the organisational climate that ensure staff cooperation. They make the work environment a happier, more productive one and less prone to stress.

### Reference

Morieux, Y 2017. Six ways to get people to solve problems without you. *Harvard Business review OnPoint*, Fall 2017, pages 74-81.





## A manual for the manager

The title of the book is a bit unfair on the author. It refers to the "new manager". This book is of value to any manager whether the managerial appointment was made today or many years ago. Those aspiring to such a position would also find the book of value.

Steven Jacobs was the head boy at Ferndale High School in Johannesburg. In the book he acknowledges the role that the headmaster, Mr Stan Brown, played in nurturing his leadership potential. Steven Jacobs has spent 25 years in various leadership positions in the corporate world.

This book is an easy read. The sound leadership and management theories are presented through personal anecdotes and case studies. There's a down-to-earth honesty about mistakes made and management traps which he encourages his readers to avoid.

The author has looked into six broad areas which confront every manager and person who is responsible for leading others:

- How to gain credibility
- How to bond with your team
- How to lead in the storm
- How to develop individuals
- How to manage team performance
- Performance rating

Many members of a school management team will nod in agreement as they turn the pages of

the book. They're already dealing with the same or similar issues in their own schools. Yet they will also get new insights into how to deal with such challenges.

Although the book is set in the corporate environment, there are significant parallels to the school situation. A little tweaking is needed to see the relevance of the book to an educational setting. Get the book for yourself or for your staff library. Apply the 52 tips outlined in Steven Jacob's book. The potential benefits to you and your school could be huge.

### Steven Jacobs and decision-making

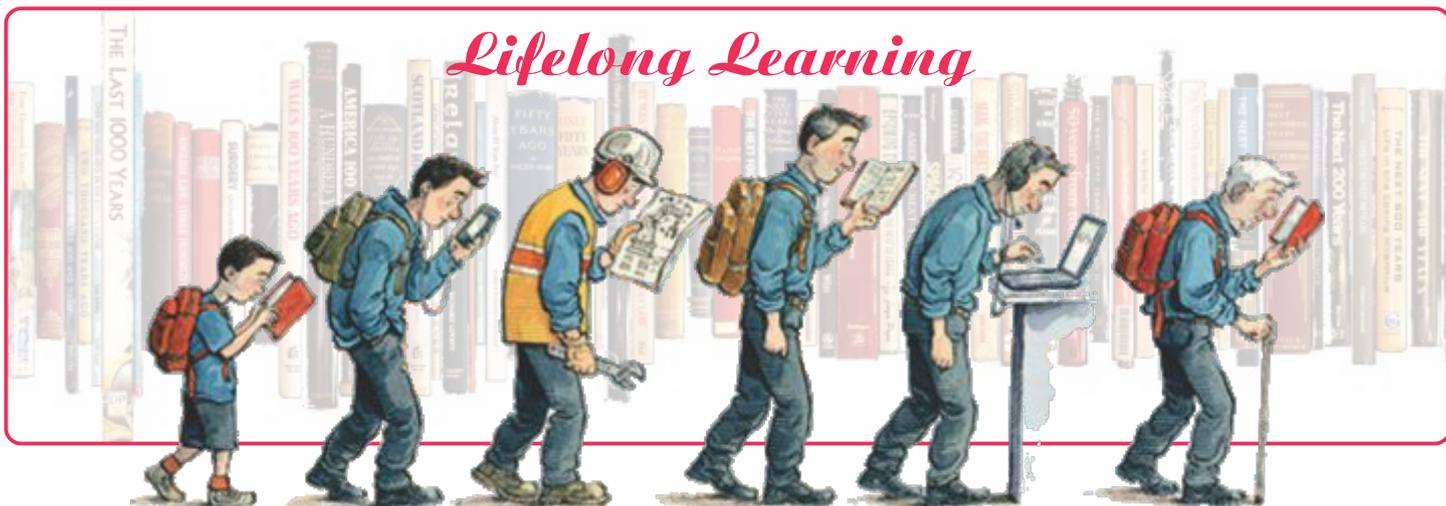
In his book, Steven Jacobs writes of the need for wisdom when making decisions. He's had one-on-one sessions with professional colleagues who've guided him; there have been the mentors through the years.

Another source of guidance has been his wide reading which included the works of great leaders such as Jim Collins, Charles Hardy, Abraham Lincoln, Nelson Mandela and John C Maxwell.

Jacobs cautions the individual against thinking that they alone can make the right decisions (page 32):

*Too often leaders operate alone and refuse to take advantage of the extraordinary wealth of the people below, next to and above them. Instead they rely on their own experience and knowledge to make decisions, which at times can lead to catastrophic consequences.*

**Author:** Steven Jacobs  
**Title:** The new manager: How to become a leader in 52 simple steps  
**Publisher:** Cape Town: Penguin  
**Price:** R 225  
**ISBN** 978 1 77609 101 0



*Introverted children: making sure that they shine* is a workshop done by Dr Richard Hayward that has just been endorsed by SACE. It earns 5 Professional Development points. If you would like more details of this programme and the other eleven that are SACE-endorsed, please contact him. An information circular will be emailed to you. Richard's details are [rpdhayward@yahoo.com](mailto:rpdhayward@yahoo.com) or 011 888 3262.



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