**PRINCIPALS’ DIGESTS**

30 Palliser Drive •Hamilton• NZ 3210• Tel 07 855 7101

digests@xtra.co.nz•www.principalsdigests.co.nz

Digests may be copied and distributed in the school community of the subscriber.

Leadership Volume 22 Number 37

# Image result for ethical decision makingCONSIDERATIONS WHEN MAKING ETHICAL DECISIONS

**Judgment is hard to define. It is a fusion of your thinking, feelings, experience, imagination and character. Good judgment is crucial when leaders are called upon to make decisions in situations where information is incomplete, boundaries are unclear and colleagues disagree. In grey areas, your job isn’t *finding* solutions, it’s *creating* them, relying on your judgment.**

**KEY QUESTIONS**

**What are the net consequences of all your options?**

**This is not just about a cost-benefit analysis nor is it going with your gut.** Truly difficult problems require you to think more broadly, deeply, concretely, imaginatively and objectively about the full impact of your choices. You list all potential moves and all probable outcomes, or designate certain people to act as devil’s advocates to find holes in your thinking and prevent you from rushing to conclusions or succumbing to groupthink.

**What are your core obligations?** **These are your duties to safeguard and respect the lives, rights and dignity of our fellow men and women – and children.** You do this by relying on what philosophers call your ‘moral imagination.’ That involves stepping out of your comfort zone, recognising your biases and blind spots, and putting yourself in the shoes of all key stakeholders, especially the most vulnerable ones. How would you feel in their place?”

**What will work in the world as it is?**

**The world is often unpredictable, difficult, and shaped by self-interest.** Sound plans can turn out badly, and bad plans sometimes work. You must also ready yourself to be agile and even opportunistic, manoeuvring around any roadblocks or surprises, and, when the situation calls for it, to play hardball, asserting your authority and reminding others who is the boss.

**Who are we?**

**Humans are by nature social animals so you need to step back and think about your decision in terms of relationships, values and norms.** What really matters to school and culture? How can you act in a way that reflects and expresses those belief systems? If they conflict, which should take precedence?

**What can I live with?**

**You cannot go ahead with something just because your brain told you it was the right thing to do.** You have to get your brain and gut into harmony. End your conversations with others, close the door, mute the electronics, and stop to reflect. Imagine yourself explaining your decision to a close friend or a mentor, someone you trust and respect deeply. Would you feel comfortable? How would that person react?” Putting the decision and the rationale in writing also forces clearer thinking and serves as a form of personal commitment.

Acknowledgement: “How to Tackle Your Toughest Decisions” by Joseph Badaracco in *Harvard Business Review*, September 2016