

When your company or organization has to make an important decision, does it tap everyone's best thinking, work efficiently, and get superior results? Does it identify the real issues clearly and effectively? Does it get each person's unbiased view of what would be best for the organization? Do all options for a proposed project or decision get out on the table? Does it listen to everyone's pros-cons for each option—without debate or divisive conflict--before deciding? Don Maruska, a leading business coach, columnist, and author addresses all of these questions and more with his innovative 10-step process that shows us...

# How Great Decisions Get Made

**Don't waste another minute debating.  
Make great decisions and enjoy lasting results.  
Be an agent of hope in a fearful world hungering for fresh solutions.**

"I really enjoy my work, but the way decisions are made around here is killing me." Sound familiar? From the boardroom to the conference room to city hall, members of teams everywhere find it difficult, if not impossible to resolve tough issues together. Instead of cooperation and encouragement, they face: battling egos, conflicting styles, lack of commitment and follow through, office politics, and the increasing need for fast-paced action.

Irreconcilable differences, in an atmosphere of defeatism combined with a legacy of distrust, undermine an organization's ability to function at its peak level. Despite the advances in communication technologies, many businesses and organizations have yet to find a positive and consistent results-oriented process for reaching an agreement as a team.

Don Maruska offers a fundamental solution. For more than a decade, Fortune 500 companies, growth businesses, city governments, and non-profit organizations have asked him to show them the way out of difficult decision-making dilemmas. They sought help because they experienced the process of making a choice as stifled by conflicting styles, stalled by lack of communication, and trounced by discouragement and defeat. Don's new book, **How Great Decisions Get Made: 10 Easy Steps For Reaching Agreement On Even The Toughest Issues** (Amacom, November 2003) details his proven ten-step process to facilitate breakthrough decisions.

Maruska's book provides dozens of examples based on real-life situations where the process has successfully helped thousands of people. You'll learn through the experiences of more than a decade of work with teams of managers and leaders and groups of employees and participants that faced some of the toughest issues of their careers. See how they gained results and a greater degree of trust and a better spirit of cooperation.

The steps necessary to make the right decisions in cases where valuable human and financial capital are at risk, not to mention the life of the organization being at stake, are crucial. Maruska has found that when groups follow his ten steps amazing results naturally flow. The steps include using all available resources, engaging the insights and ideas of everyone who may be impacted by the final decision.

"The first mistake managers make," says Maruska, "is they often exclude people from the process, believing there's not enough time or other people have nothing to offer, or worse, fearing that they'll hear truths they want to ignore. Traditional views of the self-reliant individual feed our egos and our desire for self-importance and control. But they do not fit with the interdependent world in which we live."

His ten-step process grew out of his own experience with a frustrating business venture and his discovery of a compelling alternative. He is guided by the key belief that hopes -- not fears and expectations -- bring out the best in people and that cooperation -- not competition -- wins in the end. The structured process provides an efficient way to engage the creativity and commitment of three to three hundred people.

Maruska's process guides group members when they need to make a decision and work together. The process creates teamwork and opens up communication, which, separate from the outcomes of the decision you make together, will boost production and make for a more positive environment. "No matter what kind of group you're involved with or the types of people within it," says Maruska, "the dynamics of how that group makes decisions can change for the better."

**How Great Decisions Get Made** enables every group to:

- **Tap each person's positive, creative spirit.**
- **Find common ground to build upon.**
- **Thoroughly, yet efficiently, identify and review key alternatives.**
- **Gain agreement among even the most diverse participants.**
- **Celebrate the successes and agilely adjust to change.**

"The process proves an important truth," concludes Maruska. "When you change a few things about how people discuss and deal with issues, you can dramatically improve how they participate and what they achieve. You don't have to change who they are or what they think. The process simply invites them to be their better selves and discover opportunities to work together that their fears and unproductive dynamics had hidden." Some of the steps include: uncovering the real issues; getting everything on the table; and making choices that support your shared hopes.

Maruska warns us, "Don't let obstacles keep you and your group from making progress. Some people despair that they lack time or that they aren't in charge." He identifies six common obstacles and offers strategies to handle them in a quick and painless manner. For example, his 30-Minute Miracle technique provides a quick-start agreement process when time is short, letting people work smarter and faster. Another strategy outlines how to employ technology for E-teams that need to resolve issues even if they can't meet face to face. Another chapter guides people to put the process into practice even when they aren't in charge. Anyone can promote positive changes and enjoy valuable results with this process.

Maruska emphasizes, "This process focuses on exchanging information rather than confrontational debate. It gives workers and managers a way to be constructive, find shared solutions, and enjoy lasting results together."

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# Don Maruska

## Biography

Don Maruska, the author of **HOW GREAT DECISIONS GET MADE** (AMACOM, November 2003), has written “Business Success,” for the past five years, a column distributed through the Knight-Ridder Business Wire to over 200 newspapers in the United States, and through Reuters to overseas publications.

Maruska’s expertise comes from personal experience. He was vice president of marketing for a telecommunications and software company that later became E\*Trade. He also was a founder and CEO of three Silicon Valley companies (Health Advantage Ventures, Sun Medical Technologies, and Spectra Biomedical). The creative results of applying new technologies to health care earned Health Advantage Ventures the 1988 National Innovators Award.

As a venture investor, he contributed to the growth of start-up businesses that became stock market successes. He also learned what can go wrong with a company internally when personalities clash, opinions differ, and money issues tear at professional relationships and cause a company to falter.

He is now one of the top business coaches in the country. He serves a diverse group of clients, which range from executives and work groups in Fortune 500 companies to managers of high-growth businesses. These clients also cover a range of industries, including technology-based companies, manufacturing businesses, consumer products, and professional service firms.

Maruska has managed consulting projects for national and international clients of McKinsey & Company. As a master certified coach, he has worked with a diverse group of clients, including: Duke Energy, Marian Medical Center, Pacific Gas & Electric, U.S. Bureau of Land Management, City of West Hollywood, Promega Biosciences, and the Private Industry Council.

In the public sector, Maruska serves city, county, and statewide organizations. Local government clients have earned awards for innovative and effective programs that he has fostered in the areas of goal setting, teamwork, and organizational vitality. He founded and manages a statewide coaching program promoting excellence among California’s municipal finance directors.

Maruska graduated with an A.B. magna cum laude from Harvard University and an MBA and JD from Stanford University. He acquired specialized skills from Coach University, an international training organization.

His office is in Morro Bay, California. For more information, please consult [www.howgreatdecisionsgetmade.com](http://www.howgreatdecisionsgetmade.com) and [www.donmaruska.com](http://www.donmaruska.com)

# Q&A

## Don Maruska

### How Great Decisions Get Made

***What is the single most common obstacle to getting a board or management group to make decisions that not only turn out to be very good ones but also gain the support of the workers that have to carry the load?*** Fear is the most common obstacle. Participants fear that there won't be enough resources or recognition to go around. They become self-protective and fight, freeze, or flee. Rather than learning together, they become advocates of their own positions. They exclude people who need to be involved for successful implementation. As fear mounts, participants lose sight of their true hopes—their deepest aspirations for their work and organization. For example, the best and brightest in a Fortune 100 company struggled to define a common software system for their next generation of products. Each person wanted the system that favored his or her particular project. The result is that they couldn't build upon one another's ideas and develop a family of products for the future.

***Why are typical processes for solving tough issues so traumatic for people?*** The forces of fear unleash a cascade of negative dynamics. When people are fearful, they become wary of other people. Instead of seeking understanding, they look for advantage. They try to control the situation to protect their preset ideas and desired outcomes. It becomes a contest of wills. Who will prevail and get the recognition, resources, and rewards? Who will lose out? Finally, in time, lose-lose dynamics become the norm. Together they create the very scarcity they feared. You can observe these dynamics in your own life. What happens when you are feeling fearful? People typically report becoming self-protective, abrupt, and short-tempered. Rather than engaging their hopes and making a bigger pie together, they struggle to grab their own slice.

***What role must a president or CEO serve when his or her management team is formulating strategy and making decisions?*** Leaders have an important role to play in helping their teams move from fears to hopes. This is much more than motivation. It's encouraging participants to articulate their own hopes for the organization and identify shared aspirations. These provide the foundation for constructive action and broad ownership to sustain it. Effective leaders also need a process for their teams to translate their shared hopes into action. The ten-step process provides a practical, proven way to accomplish extraordinary results. It enables managers to unleash the power of their teams and to free themselves from the illusion of being in control. But, you don't have to be in charge to put the process into play. The book illustrates how employees at all levels have used the steps to gain important breakthroughs.

***How do you go about creating an environment of trust and a better spirit of cooperation?*** Two simple questions turn around any situation: "What are your hopes [for your organization or about this issue]?" and "Why are they important to you?" When people start talking about what they really want and why that's important to them, they move off their preset positions and begin to discover deeper, shared aspirations. This has proven true even with groups that have been in litigation with one another! They learn to trust the process to get them through. And, as they gain results, their success together builds trust and cooperation for the future. A special chapter in the

book provides detailed guidance on how to dissolve old differences and build trust. It shows how businesses, government agencies, and community organizations discovered new possibilities.

***Some decisions get made too quickly without proper research or consultation of others. But some decisions seem to never get made on time because too much deliberation and inclusiveness plagues a company's leadership. Where's the happy medium to be found?*** The ten-step process is designed to be inclusive, creative, efficient, and effective. It accomplishes these multiple objectives because it focuses upon 100% information and 0% debate. It eliminates the adversarial dynamics that exclude people, stifle creativity, waste time, and block effective implementation. The process avoids the dilemma of how to involve everyone and get a timely decision. One of the particularly interesting observations is that people often get to the same solution but from very different perspectives. The "Solution Finder" in Step #8 enables participants to find great results quickly. As a successful entrepreneur and business owner, I always look for the best way to get a job done. That's why I've dedicated myself to sharing this process. It works! You can do it.

***You have applied the process for more than a decade with Fortune 500 companies, growth business, city governments, and non-profit organizations. What are the common problems where they sought help?*** These organizations turned to me for help in resolving the toughest issues they faced. For Fortune 500 companies, the issues included a major development project with hundreds of millions of dollars at stake and huge obstacles. Another involved a manufacturing plant where an intermittent problem created million-dollar-a-day losses. Yet another required deciding on the next generation of products for a multi-billion dollar business. Applications in growth companies included determining how to unleash their potential and structure the next stage of growth to dramatically expand their revenues and profits. Government agencies and non-profits have used the process to establish key priorities, resolve multi-million dollar budget shortfalls, and gain agreement on contentious natural resource issues, new educational facilities, and critical projects.

***What role does fear play in the decision-making process?*** The ten-step process removes fear from decision making. Each of the steps supports a positive mindset and productive dynamics. The important insight from the process is that you can make small, easy to apply changes in how people work together and get dramatically improved results. The results are immediate. Ultimately, the positive results eliminate fear. People realize that they have a choice on how they work together and decide issues, and they choose the successful path. A clear process is critical to sustained success. Since fear is so engrained in our culture, there are many pressures to relapse. That's why it's important for people throughout an organization to know the process so that they can support one another in applying it.

***Some participants continually strive for personal recognition (ego), reward (money), and power (title) at the expense of others. How should other members handle this person while trying to come to agreement on an issue?*** One of the special benefits of the ten-step process is how it encourages people to be their better, more hopeful selves rather than default to their fearful selves. Using this process has revealed the better side of even the most power-hungry people. For example, Step #6 provides a way for each participant to present information about the negatives and positives for each option. Since no one advocates a particular position, it eliminates the struggle for power and control. With only one comment from each person at a time, no one dominates the discussion. Many people note that these are the best conversations on tough issues that they've ever had with otherwise difficult people.

***A company you helped found with two others in the early 1990's surrounded a potential medical breakthrough, but when you need a multi-million dollar infusion of capital the timing was wrong as the biotech sector was in a down cycle. In the process of seeking financing, the relationship between the three of you degraded and everyone fought for company control. As the CEO you were forced out. What lessons did you learn from this?*** The experience taught me that you can have good people and a good purpose but without a good process for deciding tough issues you can tear one another apart. Fears about loss of title or prestige and lack of money bring out the worst in people. I needed to find a better way. While personally painful, the loss invited me to rethink my own deepest hopes and aspirations and how to pursue them. As I gained perspective on my experience, I realized that many people and organizations face tough issues like I did and need better tools to deal with them. It became an opportunity to learn and follow a different path.

***The basis of your book, how great decisions get made, came about from an unexpected source--an Episcopal priest and modern day spiritual guide named Art Stevens. How did that happen?*** Amidst the turmoil in my business life, my wife and I confronted some difficult issues in our marriage. While we've always loved one another, we had the clash of two strong-willed professional people with the spice of a demanding toddler added to the equation. Art shared with us a decision-making process based upon centuries old traditions of spiritual discernment. In our first application of it, we quickly reached a decision that we both supported. It gave us a process we could use together. Immediately, I saw the potential to apply the process in many areas, including business. What it needed was further development to relate to contemporary organizational dynamics and a way of presenting it that is accessible to diverse audiences.

***So you actually implemented the decision-making process in your marriage first?*** Yes. One of the powerful features of the ten-step process is its usefulness in many areas—businesses, government, and community organizations. Participants appreciate how they can learn and practice the process in many arenas of their lives. For example, they can try it at work and benefit from it at home. This integrates people's lives in a constructive way. Versatility is extremely valuable. I don't know any spouses who'd like to apply other management concepts like "re-engineering" or "downsizing" to their homes. Yet, my wife and I regularly use the ten-step process for important family decisions on roles and responsibilities and even family vacations. As engrained as I am in the process, I benefit from my wife's gentle reminders to apply it at home.

***Step #3 in the process is to "uncover the real issues." How does one go about doing this?*** This is a profoundly important step. In most situations, the issue on the table isn't the real issue. That is, it's not the one that's most in need of resolution to get results. The way to uncover the real issue is straightforward. The key is thoughtful listening. Ask each person to express his or her thoughts and feelings. Use "I" statements to avoid judging others. Listen without leaping to debate or solutions. Reflect back what you hear. Don't editorialize. Ask the speaker if you have accurately reflected what he or she wanted to say. The underlying issue that the group needs to address will percolate to the surface.

***Step #6 seems to be very difficult-- "get everything on the table." Won't this cause conflict when people hear things that they don't want to know?*** No. Step #6 is actually very easy. Since there is no debate among the participants about the information exchanged, people can listen openly. For example, if someone thinks that what another member said about an option is actually a positive rather than a negative, he or she can simply state the positive when it's time. Unlike typical decision processes, the ten-step process allows people to hear new information and change their minds without losing face. In fact, Step #6 is one of the most favored steps in the

whole process. It enables many people to provide their insights very quickly. As a business leader noted, "Listening openly to the strengths and weaknesses of each option prompted even better ideas. This step is both efficient and effective."

***Don, you were the founder and CEO of three Silicon Valley companies, winning the coveted national Innovators Award for successful development of new healthcare delivery businesses. You also served as VP of marketing for a computer telecommunications and software company that became E\*Trade. Do you find any differences, based on industry or age of participants, in how decisions get made by most of corporate America today?*** While there are some differences among industries and age groups, there also are common factors. New high tech firms, especially during the dot.com era, placed a huge premium on speed. In fact, the decision-making processes many followed reminded me of teenagers playing pinball. They bounced around from one decision to another, but they rarely enjoyed lasting results. In contrast, mainline industries with diverse workforces and years of collaborative work experience are at the other end of the spectrum. They often get bogged down in making decisions and lag in their adaptations to change. The power of the ten-step process is that it functions effectively across the spectrum of high-tech, low-tech, and services businesses. This is particularly an asset when different organizations with different cultures need to work together on a project.

**Over the past five years you've written "Business Success," a highly acclaimed column distributed to 200 newspapers via the Knight-Ridder Business Wire. Have you found that companies approach decisions differently as they went from the boom 90's to the bust 21<sup>st</sup> century?** Yes. The boom 90's was a binge of euphoria. People were unrealistically optimistic about their businesses. With the bust, the economy is awakening like a drunk sobering up on the morning after. There are many headaches and bad cases of the shakes. In the current environment, fear is rampant. Just when we need people's best ideas and collaboration, many persons cower and withdraw. There is a hunger, however, for a way out of this malaise. For example, scores of readers responded enthusiastically to my recent column on how to be an agent of hope in a fearful world. It's time for a new approach.

***What would you tell the disfranchised employee who feels his or her voice is never heard by management and often suffers from poor teamwork?*** Don't give up. You can make a difference and make it now. In fact, for many organizations, the employees will be key to healthy change. Many managers are too vested in their positions and control needs to initiate the path to change. They need your help. The book has a chapter dedicated to how you can persuasively implement the process even when you are not in charge. The key is to avoid making the situation a power play. Instead, follow techniques that invite people to try the steps and offer choices from which they can choose. A demure, mid-level manager used these approaches to turn around her fiery CEO who endangered the company's future. Similarly, you can guide your organization to improved results.

**The pace of conducting business seems to keep increasing. More and more businesses have to compete on a global level. The decision-making process can become complex, tension filled, and conflicted. How does your ten-step process ease these situations?** "How Great Decisions Get Made" provides a series of practical tools that have proven their effectiveness. For example, one chapter describes the "30-Minute Miracle" for deciding tough issues when you truly have limited time. You don't have to tradeoff quality for time. You simply need the right tools. Virtual teams face particular challenges. A special chapter describes how to apply communication technologies with the ten-step process to be an effective E-Team. Yet another chapter solves the problem of how to deal with very large groups. In short, the book provides a full tool kit to serve the demanding situations people face in rapidly changing environments.

# HOW GREAT DECISIONS GET MADE

## 10 Steps For Reaching Agreement

**Step 1: Enlist Everyone** The most valuable contribution can come from the most unexpected source. Involve the rank and file and go beyond the traditional limited-group approach. Go beyond consulting the 'key players' and you will find the sum is greater than the parts. Each person is needed to get real results.

**Step 2: Discover Shared Hopes** Before you get started and jump to specific solutions, inquire what each person hopes will result from the efforts and why it is important to them. By clarifying objectives, clearing up misconceptions, and communicating a common goal, everyone focuses on the same agenda.

**Step 3: Uncover The Real Issues** When an issue has festered for a long time, it's usually a sign that some other issue underlies it. Before you can offer a solution, understand the problem. Take a few moments for each person to express his or her thoughts and concerns about the topic to accomplish this.

**Step 4: Identify All Options** Brainstorm to get many options on the table for possible consideration. Have everyone offer a viable option while not repeating anything anyone else said. No one should agree or disagree with anyone -- just offer ideas, not judgments.

**Step 5: Gather The Right Information** Efficiently focus attention on what is important and clearly define the types of information needed. Do not gather information for each option on its own, but organize your efforts by your hopes and the bottom-line objective that you seek to accomplish.

**Step 6: Get Everything On The Table** Have everyone offer a pro and con to all viable options that were previously suggested. Do not debate with one another.

**Step 7: Write Down Choices That Support Hopes** Find out what each person candidly thinks about the choices. Each person will list what looks like the best option to fulfill their shared hopes and note acceptable alternatives. This straw ballot gives a quick, honest look at possible solutions.

**Step 8: Map Solutions** Tabulate the results on a flip chart to see where all of the options land. Look at possible ways to improve upon the most appealing alternatives and find a solution that everyone will support.

**Step 9: Look Ahead** Before you rush off to implement a solution, identify a back-up plan and schedule early opportunities to examine how the solution performs and compares with acceptable alternatives.

**Step 10: Stay Charged Up!** Bring everyone together and hear from people about how the results support the hopes they share. It is time to celebrate what you have accomplished and encourage people to continue to work together effectively, with newfound direction and momentum.

# Fighters & Non-Confrontationalists

## How Great Decisions Get Doomed

### Which One Are You?

Are you a fighter or a non-confrontationalist? Don Maruska has identified nine personality types that tend to dominate the office -- and none of them contribute to a healthy decision-making process. Do you recognize yourself amongst these agitators, exclusionists and decision-avoiders?

The Fighters take many familiar forms.

*The Gladiator* is someone who lives to fight. Each situation is a personal battle.

*The Boss* is the person who exercises power based upon position of authority. He or she makes all the decisions. Employees automatically go along with (but perhaps secretly resist) the company line.

*The Debater* is the person who becomes pitted against another debater with an opposing view. Arguments continue until one side weakens or the bond between the two frays and finally breaks.

*The Majority Ruler* is the polite form of the gladiator who wreaks havoc by saying, "let's take a vote and let the majority rule." Even in "landslides," 40% or more of the people are frustrated with the decision.

*The Briber* likes to bargain, and will cajole, "Give me what I want on this and I will support you on that."

*The Blackmailer*, true to the name, is threatening. "If I don't get my way, I'll hurt you in some way." Not surprisingly, dealing with a blackmailer precludes either rational discussion or cooperative action.

The Non-Confrontationalists are the polar opposite of the gladiators. Their modus operandi is capitulation or avoidance at all cost. There are three non-confrontational types.

*The Placater* agrees to solutions that avoid conflict. This person may settle for the lowest common denominator in order to keep the peace. A placater doesn't grapple with the real issue. When meetings take place, other participants roll their eyes as a placater dodges the issues or simply restates someone else's point of view. Hiding from confrontation is a key mission, often to the detriment of real progress.

*The Pollyanna* is a person who ignores tough issues. Pollyannas hope that problems or concerns will disappear without their involvement.

*The Whiner* is known for being so unpleasant to other people that they concede the whiner's point just to stop the nuisance. The whiner's passive-aggressive behavior is especially aggravating.

While they are not in your face fighters, non-confrontationalists still cause problems to fester and prevent positive action. By avoiding issues and making their co-workers' lives miserable, they create an environment full of fear and unhappiness.

## **Identify All Options**

### **Putting Step # 4 Into Practice**

1. Stimulate new ideas. Our minds are waiting for the opportunity to align our thinking in new ways. Use catalysts: concepts that trigger new thinking; word pictures, which describe a situation from analogous perspectives; and physical movement, to open up fresh options.
2. Invite each person to state one option in turn. After each member of your group has had a few moments to reflect about the issue and your shared hopes for it, have someone begin by mentioning an option. Proceed to the next person and invite him or her to offer a different option. Encourage new ideas.
3. Avoid debate or comments. Stick to an open brainstorming approach. This is not the time to evaluate options. Debate discourages people from offering new, untried ideas. You'll identify each option's positives and negatives later.
4. Expand your perspectives playfully. As you brainstorm, encourage logical thoughts (left brain), creative thoughts (right brain), and deep senses (gut feelings). Find ways to give expression to intuition. For example, draw pictures of the options or imagine what each might say if it could talk. Have some fun as you proceed. It will lighten the work and open up new ideas.
5. Continue brainstorming until all options have been offered. Proceed around the group, with each person offering a new option, until everyone has expressed his or her ideas. This may take several rounds. Encourage participants to identify other options even if someone has already mentioned their favored solutions. When they offer options outside their preset point of view, they loosen their attachment to specific outcomes and begin the process of identifying with new possibilities. If, after going around the group, all you have are the options you started with, dig deeper. But don't worry if you end with a feeling that you don't have a complete set of options. Later steps in the decision-making process will help you uncover new possibilities.
6. List all viable options, from the status quo to the more adventuresome, that you'd like to investigate. After the brainstorming, decide which of the options merit further consideration. If you are unsure about whether to evaluate an option, include it on your list. It won't take your group very long to assess it, and including it ensures that no one's option gets cut off prematurely. Be inclusive of diverse options at the start. It will increase buy-in for the final choices your group makes.

## **Get Everything On The Table**

### **Putting Step # 6 Into Practice**

1. Use your shared hopes as the basis for evaluating options and choices of action. Before evaluating the first option, reflect on the hopes you share as a group for the issue. When participants look at the bigger picture, and consider what is desirable for the group, they provide deeper, more useful insights.
2. Begin with the status quo option and proceed to the more adventuresome options. Work through the list of options you have developed, but evaluate the status quo option first, as this will be your benchmark for considering other options. Participants need to understand and exchange the negatives and positives of the current situation as a springboard for considering new directions.
3. Start with an option's negative points. Have each person express a different negative. Proceed around the group in this way until all negatives have been stated for the option. If a person can only think of a negative someone else mentioned, she or he passes. Repetition of information causes people to choose sides. Be sure to start with the negatives about an option, because most people are better able to consider positives after starting with negatives. Encourage people that favor a particular option to participate in expressing its negatives. Often they know its shortcomings better than anyone else.
4. Have everyone listen to what others are saying without questioning or debating. Even if you don't agree with someone's negative, acknowledge and accept it as his or her point of view. After hearing other points of views, people might revise their thinking. You don't need to argue with someone else's specific reasons to agree on a shared course of action. The more contentious the issue, the more important it is to avoid debate. Remember that winners and losers make poor learners. Listen for shared wisdom.
5. Next, state the positives for the option. Follow the same guidelines and procedures you followed for expressing negatives, but have each person express a different positive about the option. Encourage naysayers to identify something positive. Sometimes one participant will mention a positive that someone else stated as a negative. It's all right to have the same point arise in the listings of both negatives and positives.
6. Proceed to express the negatives and positives of each of the remaining options. Use the same process for expressing negatives and positives to address each of the other options. The structured discussion promotes balance and candor. Advocates of an option usually become more open to other options because they know it will look like they are stacking the deck if they say only positives about their own ideas and negatives about other options.
7. After hearing all the negatives and positives for each of your initial options, invite new alternatives. The open expressions of negatives and positives and balanced participation of all members frequently stimulate ideas for new options. Often something better arises than what you first considered. This new learning is one of the great joys of the process and proof that the process is creating distinctive value for your organization.

*The E-Team*  
**How To Make Great Decisions  
Through Virtual Team Meetings**  
by Don Maruska

Global markets, work-at-home employees, overlapping travel schedules, fast-paced technical developments, cash crunches, and pressure for fast and effective results have spawned virtual teams. Gathering people together in one physical location can be almost as difficult as reaching agreement on an issue.

How will you resolve tough issues in a complex organizational setting? What tools will you use? Who will participate and how will they span potentially vast differences in cultures, locations, and time zones to communicate effectively?

Decision-making styles and ways of working differ. Some virtual teams limit themselves to discussing those items upon which everyone can agree. Others let dominant participants fill the leadership void. Some groups work well in person but fall apart when members go back to their respective locations. A virtual team with outstanding talent will get caught in those dilemmas unless it finds a common process and satisfying ways for participants to plug into it.

Dispersed groups, especially those with organizational differences, benefit from the ten-step process to making great decisions. It defines roles participants can fill and contributions they can make wherever they are.

When you can't get everyone in the same place at the same time for the whole process, three simple tools will bridge the distance: in-person meetings where possible; video or telephone conference calls; and e-mail. You can augment these tools with Web-based meeting tools, if you want, but keep it simple. The technology needs to support the process, not distract from it.

Limit e-mail or one-way Web communication to information exchanges. Everyone has lived through some version of "e-mail hell" -- a misguided e-mail that plagues a group or organization for weeks, months, even years. Without seeing someone's body language or hearing his or her voice, we miss the cues that give an emotional context for a message. Was a team member's comment a criticism or just an observation? Without context, we may misread the content.

Some people also shoot out e-mail messages and hope that they won't have to deal with the recipients. This isn't teamwork. It's team avoidance. Especially with tough issues, limit e-mails to exchanging information. Keep the messages factual and direct.

Don't let the tools supplant the process. As you work through the process, be wary of electronic tools that promote instant polling or feedback. As you work to resolve tough issues, you are trying not only to understand what people already think but also to create opportunities for them to learn new information. The goal is to transform the issue and the participants' thoughts about it. These are the ingredients for breakthrough results. This process requires personal connections and dialogue among participants, not opinion polls.

Improvements in technology will certainly make communication more interactive. As you consider the new developments, however, review the objectives and needs for each step to assess how new tools will serve them. And remember that, while new communication hardware is appealing, human software needs to drive its use.

The following chart clusters the ten steps according to their communication needs and suggested tools. By structuring the process around schedules, technology and human needs, you will make great decisions efficiently and even happily.

**Process Steps**

Steps # 1 - 4: Form the team, discover your shared hopes, uncover the real issues, and identify all options.

Step #5: Gather information about how the options relate to your shared hopes.

Step #6: Express negatives and positives of each option and create potential new options.

Step #7: Write down choices.

Step #8: Map solutions.

Steps #9-10: Look ahead and stay charged up.

**Communication Needs**

Communication needs to be as direct and as immediate as possible -- something that engages verbal and visual content as well as feelings.

Information exchange can occur over time. Immediate, face-to-face communication is not required.

Participants need to hear that each person is providing balanced input and is brainstorming to find improved solutions.

Straw ballots need anonymity.

Everyone needs to discuss the tabulated results on the Solution Finder.

Participants need to confirm direction and results and celebrate how their actions link with their shared hopes.

**Suggested Tools**

a. In-person meeting or  
b. Video or telephone conference call (with Web support and/or advance distribution of materials).

E-mail exchanges or Web-based posting of information.

Video or telephone conference call (with access to results via Web or e-mail distribution).

E-mail or web-based submission of ballots.

Video or telephone conference call (with access to Solution Finder results via Web or e-mail distribution).

a. In-person meeting or  
b. Video or telephone conference call (with Web support and/or advance distribution of materials).

# The Fear Factor

by Don Maruska

Why do typical decision processes produce ineffective and lackluster results at even the world's biggest companies? The answer is fear. Hardly anyone is immune from the contagion of fear that can envelop a tough issue. Even the best and the brightest of us succumb to it. Even in an environment of abundance, fear can cause people to see scarcity. And, once fear takes hold, all decision making becomes difficult.

Unfortunately, the primary reason that fear-driven group dynamics are so pervasive is that at some level they get results. Managers who win at office politics by spreading fear feel vindicated, especially when they advance in their organizations. So why should they change their tactics when they work? Employees of start-ups, afraid that they'll run out of money or that a major competitor will crush them, work extremely long hours, and often their on-the-edge performance gets good results.

The fact is, though, that while fear can provide near-term benefits, those benefits usually come at the cost of long-term consequences. Fear-induced behavior marginalizes and discourages employees who lose out in power struggles. Eventually these people stop offering their new ideas and voicing their concerns, because they fear they will just be shot down. And the problem is not just inside the office. Fear can also cause missed opportunities to forge collaborations with suppliers or competitors and build new markets.

As opportunities -- and risks -- become greater, the potential for fears to overtake an organization's decision-making dynamic mounts. When difficult circumstances arise or big financial interests are at stake, groups clamp down, becoming less open to fresh insights or unconventional thinking. The quest for control overrides inclusion and respect. All that is wanted are preconceived results.

Fear provokes a destructive cycle of decision-making problems, including:

- **People get left out of the decision-making process**
- **Participants lose sight of what they really want**
- **Information gathering becomes biased and inefficient**
- **All of the choices and areas for potential agreement and opportunities don't get explored**

The ten-step process outlined in *How Great Decisions Get Made* avoids the problems fear pose. Additionally, the following guidelines help everyone respond positively to change:

- Be prepared to change direction if the selected decision isn't working. Consider whether the acceptable alternatives have become more desirable.
- Encourage active inquiries about how your decisions are working. Invite everyone to identify changes affecting your choices.
- Model positive inquisitiveness for your organization. Ask: "What have we learned about the choice we made?"
- Estimate the expected life of your decision and review your choice no later than halfway through it.
- View changing your mind as a positive attribute. In fact, welcome change. Monitor and modify your decisions to incorporate it. Include change as an important part of your organization's learning loop.

## Endorsements

### HOW GREAT DECISIONS GET MADE

"Businesses, government agencies, and communities need better tools to resolve the tough issues they face. Don Maruska draws upon a wealth of experience and success in each of these areas. This book is full of keen insights and practical techniques to bring out the best in people and get results. I highly recommend it."

**--Steve Westly, California State Controller and former Senior V.P., eBay**

"Don Maruska's ten-step process has been a godsend for our business. Using it, we found a path that dramatically multiplied our growth, profitability, teamwork, and personal satisfaction. It's been a grand slam home run for us! Buy this book and enjoy the results."

**--Bill Thoma, CEO, Thoma Electric and 1997 Citizen of the Year**

"Don Maruska provides valuable insights and tools to help teams struggling to define themselves, and it works! Don has assisted our company on numerous occasions. The steps to building effective teamwork have real life meaning. This is a must-have tutorial for any business seeking methods to create and sustain high performance teamwork."

**--Bill Hall, Exec. V.P., Duke Power**

"*How Great Decisions Get Made* provides a wonderful recipe for resolving tough issues. Its clear steps and engaging stories guide readers to great results. You'll want everyone on your team to have this valuable book."

**--Jack Canfield, Co-author of *Chicken Soup for the Soul at Work* and *The Power of Focus***

"Finally, a book that show us, in a practical, engaging and tested way, how we can develop both teams and individuals in a way that will work for us all. Everyone wants to work with others in a generative way, stimulating growth for themselves and the organization. Don Maruska's book shows us the way with a practical and tested approach that gets results at every level of our being and life. This is a book that you will go back to again and again."

**--Michael Ray, author of *Creativity in Business* and professor emeritus, Stanford Business School**

"The ten-step process works! It's helped resolve some of the toughest land use issues in both coastal communities and desert areas. I've been so impressed with its effectiveness that we included it in the training for our statewide leadership team and advisory councils. This approach is building lasting value for our organization, the resources we manage, and the public we serve."

**--Mike Pool, California State Director, U.S. Bureau of Land Management**

## **Endorsements (cont'd)**

"Don't make another business decision without reading this book! Don Maruska's approach to decision making is meaningful and quick to the point. He presents valuable lessons for increasing productivity in the workplace and helps you see how your decision-making process can improve and yield better results."

**--Robyn Freedman Spizman, consumer advocate, author of 73 Books, including *Women For Hire: The Ultimate Guide To Getting A Job* with Tory Johnson**

"Getting people to agree on anything without hurting feelings or making major mistakes is always a difficult path to navigate. Maruska's book makes the process a much easier one. A MUST READ!"

**--James A. Barry, Jr., CFP®, international financial advisor, author and PBS television host of *Jim Barry's Financial Success***

"As a direct participant, I've appreciated how Don Maruska's process provided a constructive and highly productive way to resolve divisive issues. It's worked wonders to bring warring factions together on multiple projects, including education and natural resources. This is much-needed guidance for government and community organizations."

**--Shirley Bianchi, Board of Supervisors, San Luis Obispo County, California**

"This book puts aside the emotions and egos that inevitably get in the way of making smart decisions that impact productivity and peace in the boardroom and the workplace."

**--Mark Victor Hansen, Co-creator, #1 *New York Times* best-selling series *Chicken Soup for the Soul®* and co-author, *The One Minute Millionaire***

"Don Maruska's book offers a refreshing perspective and an important process that people urgently need. He has developed and clearly described an approach that quickly and efficiently engages people in complex decisions, brings out the optimal solutions, and achieves acceptance in a way that virtually eliminates opposition. Don provides more than just an efficient process; he also gives us an important productivity tool that will have a significant impact on businesses, as well as public and not-for-profit organizations."

**--John Steinhart, Silicon Valley management consultant and former director of the Stanford Sloan Program for executives**

"Don is a powerful and captivating speaker in person and on TV with no-nonsense, thought-provoking messages on resolving tough business issues. He has demonstrated the effectiveness of his 10-step process in televised sessions with elected officials and diverse groups gaining important breakthroughs. Its terrific material for national news and/or talk shows; and I eagerly await his book."

**--Richard Armfield, President (ret.), KSBY TV, an NBC affiliate**