

Great Ideas to help you Prepare for Pivotal Decisions - in Advance!

You don't *have to* prepare in advance for pivotal decisions; you do have two other choices: (a) You can wait for them to burst upon you without warning and then do your best to wing it; or, (b) you can just accept that your organization will be in a perpetual state of damage control as you struggle to mitigate the results of unanticipated pivotal decisions. Clearly, it's better to prepare in advance! Impractical as it may initially seem, it really is possible to anticipate pivotal decisions, to prepare for them in advance, and to lead through them, virtually, before they ever happen. Here's a five step process to help you do so:

First, *imagine the toughest business scenarios you might face*; reasonably predictable dilemmas in which you would be highly vulnerable. Think of all that you take for granted managerially, and imagine losing it. Consider that about which you are most certain, and think of what would happen if that certainty proved unfounded. Also included here might be a significant difference of opinion between you and your board regarding a major initiative; a particularly difficult board member, etc. Work to identify at least 5 potentially inflammatory scenarios.

Second, *identify the indicators likely to precede each scenario*. What specific occurrences would indicate that the scenario is indeed becoming imminent? Listing these will increase the probability that you'll recognize the indicators if and when they actually occur, especially those you're predisposed not to recognize due to your own biases or blind spots.

Third, walk through each scenario, one at a time, as though you were really facing the difficulty. *What are your options and what are the predictable consequences of each option?*

Which option would you choose? Why? Be sure you can clearly articulate your reasons for choosing a particular option. Fluency here will help you speak with a conviction adequate to be persuasive with key audiences.

Fourth, it's important to visualize the implementation of your chosen option. If you have trouble here, if you can't really see yourself implementing the decisions you've concluded are the correct ones, if it's your modus operandi to duck or delay the toughest decisions, then perhaps you should get out of the big chair. If the decisions cause you emotional anguish, if you rail against having to make them, realize that's exactly the kind of decision a CEO should be making, and that you're not alone in your discomfiture. But one of the luxuries you have to surrender as CEO is the luxury of behaving the way you feel. No honorable CEO relishes the implementation of decisions that will be painful to others, but your feelings cannot be the determinant for taking action.

Finally, determine what's thematic about your decision making. The criteria you use to make pivotal decisions are likely to be consistent over time. For example, are you consistently benevolent? If so, you're likely to have earned an organization of mediocre performers. Is it your pattern to be harsh? If so, you're likely to have earned resentment of your leadership. Is your modus operandi to "duck" all the incendiary issue? If so, you're likely to have earned a lack of respect for your leadership. Understand that whatever pattern you've established, it's already visible, speaking volumes to key audiences. So take some time to discern what your pattern indicates about the style and quality of your leadership. and what the impact of this pattern is on your organization. Then determine what adjustments, if any, you need to make.

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Pivotal Decisions in Association Leadership (Saturday, August 19, 2006 – 3:30 – 5:00pm)