



## Conquering Tough Team Decisions

The ability to remain a small fish in a big pond has become increasingly more difficult for many businesses in these troubled economic times. This is true of small doctor practices, to medium and large retail groups. How can you maintain your present function with all of the new government and industry regulations, how do we deal with the risk of lawsuits, and the amount of competition that continues to grow for the cautious consumer dollar? With all of these added pressures people are forced to consider alternative ways to keep the business going and when no viable alternatives can be found they often sell.

The thought of just making a change in your business can be mind numbing, stressful and take months to reach a decision. Often people are so emotionally tied to their business they cannot see past their fear, anger, or doubt to make a clear decision about the future. If the buying and selling of a home is rated as one of the top stressors for people to go through how much more is the sale of a live business that involves people.

### The Problem:

Here is a case study of how four individuals running a business faced this very decision. They were a very harmonious group that had been working together for many years and unity in this decision was their highest priority. Their greatest fear was that this decision may break them apart. Do they keep running their business as is, do they sell, do they merge with another company, or do they join a partnership? They had been struggling with this decision for a year as it was a case of a second generation family ownership and market reality. The CEO knowing that it would continue to take them months and potentially missed opportunities wanted more than just the financial figures and projections, as finances were only a part of the decision.

### The Solution:

Here is how we helped them by using the *Science of Value (Axiology)* and some key assessments. Every good business decision should have a set of defined criteria to evaluate the business options, much like buying a new chair or a piece of software for your office. The *Science of Value* suggests that the key areas of evaluation should include the areas of **people, process, and systems**. This notion is backed by the research and authors of the books **Good to Great**, and **Firms of Endearment**. Successful companies were examined to determine what lead to their success and it was found that people came first, then identifying what they did that set them apart, and then becoming more efficient at it through refined efforts and technology.

**We started with the people;** they need to know their own strengths and limits as individuals and as a team. They need to know what drives their decision, how they go about evaluating and prioritizing their decision, and how they will work through others or not to carry out that decision. This was accomplished through the use of three assessments that captured motivation, behavior, and judgment. The team was very open and willing to learn more about themselves and move beyond their usual comfort zone. The assessments were used to identify each individual's strengths with regards to decision making across the areas of **people, process and systems**. Individual debriefs were set up to walk each person through their reports, before meeting as a team. This increased personal

understanding and growth as each person become more aware of what most influenced their decisions and how they went about making them, especially the tough emotional kind.

**We then moved to a process**, we needed to provide them with a way to sort out the important criteria to logically evaluate their decision based on both their individual and team values. In the debriefs we not only identified their decision making strengths, but also asked a few question about their greatest hot spots and tension points when they considered the future decision of the company. From these and the information from the reports, and a discussion with the finical consultant about the options we developed a set of company **value criteria** that encompassed the areas of **people, process, and system**. These **value criteria** addressed the areas of concern that they had as individuals and areas the company could potentially be affect by with each option. With the use of an online survey we then asked each individual member to prioritize or rank these criteria from least important to most important.

A team workshop was then conducted that helped the team understand their individual and team strengths when dealing with **people, process, and systems**. They learned who would potentially be better at making different evaluations about the decision before them and made them aware of potential blind spots that they may need to seek additional information in to make a more informed decision. This workshop also was used to fine tune the important **value criteria** needed to help them make a clear decision. Through a series of exercises and discussion the group was able to narrow down the top 7 criteria and then used a **value matrix system** to weigh each option before them.

### The result:

It was interesting to note that a private vote taken before the workshop was very different than the weighted **value criteria** results at the end of the workshop. In the end as the team had a more unified understanding of what was important, they could separate the emotional impact of the decision, from the logical aspects of the decision, and felt they now had a **value matrix system** by which to evaluate the decision ahead and could continue to tweak it as they gathered new and more critical information to make a well informed decision.

In getting feedback on the workshop the CEO was grateful, because he said it saved months of emotional deliberating on their decision. He noted that they were able to explore and discuss aspects of their choice they may not have thought about until after the decision was made or too late into the decision process. It helped them uncover the fears individuals had toward certain options that could now be articulated and dealt with. It also helped them uncover the fears individuals had toward certain options that could now be articulated and dealt with. They also realized that they had not given one of the options a fair look, because some individuals had sided against it either out of fear, or because they just felt another option was better without really having sound criteria. Others found the workshop to be a personal growth experience as they discovered that they had been letting the group down by not sharing their valuable insights out of a need to fit in and want to avoid conflict.

This solution saved thousands of man-hours and the associated costs. But more importantly, it resulted in a decision that would greatly enhance the potential of continuing the company culture so important to the core Management team. It also addressed the individual concerns of the management team so that a win-win solution could be achieved.