

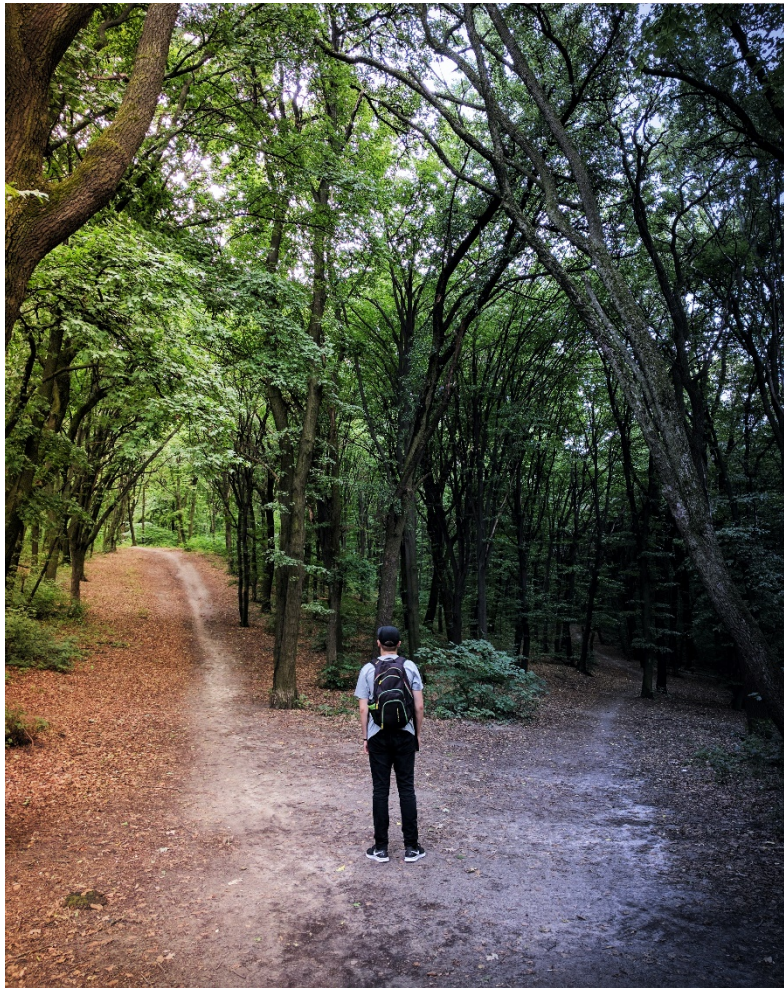
## TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE THINKING AND DECISION-MAKING

We make hundreds of decisions every day, and whether we notice it or not, we use our critical thinking skills to make these decisions. Good thinking and decision-making skills help us solve problems more easily. More and more, employers are looking for employees with good critical thinking and decision-making skills.

We use our critical thinking skills whenever we weigh up our options, whenever we order our responsibilities from most to least important and whenever we think about the likely effects of our actions.

If we are making bad decisions and creating more problems, then we need to work on improving our ability to think critically about our decisions.

Here are some tips to help you develop your critical thinking and decision-making skills so you can work your way through those tricky situations.



## 1. Clearly identify the problem



The first step of critical thinking and decision-making is understanding what your problem is. Think about what your overall goal is — what do you want to achieve? What do you want the result to look like?

You can't decide how to fix a problem unless you know exactly what your problem is first. If it's quite a big problem, break it down into smaller parts. The better you understand what your problem is, the easier it will be for you to decide how to fix it.

## 2. Don't let your emotions, or the relationship you have with someone, affect your thinking and decision making when trying to solve a problem

We often make biased choices, meaning we automatically prefer or favour one side over another, instead of giving each side of the issue a fair go. Our biases can cause us to make the wrong decisions, because we are deciding based on our feelings rather than using balanced thoughts. It is important to remember to look at the problem with a clear head.

*For example, a workmate shares with you that they stole some cash from the till because they really needed the money.*

*You know that your workmate had asked the boss for a pay rise because they've been working extra hard, and they've been with the business for a long time, but your boss had said no.*

*While you know that stealing is wrong, you still feel sorry for your workmate because they're struggling financially and can't get the help they need.*



In this situation, you might automatically choose to support your workmate, because they are your friend. But that isn't the best thing to do because you know that stealing is breaking the rules, and you want to make sure you're abiding by the rules. You need to be careful that you don't let your relationship with your workmate decide what you'll do about it.

### 3. Analyse the problem and look at it from different angles

Once you've laid out your problem, analyse it by looking at it a few ways. This is where you also need to remember to not let your relationship with someone impact your decision. You need to stay focused on making the best choice for everyone and not just the person you like more.

Continuing with the above example, you could try and look at the problem from the points of view of both your workmate *and* your boss:

*Your workmate is your friend, and you want to help and support them. You feel they did the right thing by asking for a raise and understand why they're upset about not getting it.*

*You get that your friend stole money from the till out of desperation, but you also know that stealing isn't right, no matter the excuse.*

*You also know your boss will discover that money is missing from the till when they do the tally at the end of the day. You feel angry that your friend has put you in this position because, unless they own up, you'll become a suspect along with them!*

*Lastly, you also know that your boss is giving you both a job, for which you should be grateful, and that there are plenty of other young people who would happily take your place.*



### 4. Break down the problem

Sometimes when the problem seems quite big and overwhelming, it helps to break it down into smaller parts. Separating the problem into parts also helps with thinking of possible solutions, as you can come up with how you'll fix each different part of the problem.



*For example, let's say you work at a clothing store, where your job is to sort out the stock in the back room.*

*You notice that your workmates aren't displaying the clothes correctly on the shop floor like you were all taught to do, so you spend time fixing things for them.*

*Your boss gets annoyed because of the time you've spent making the store 'look pretty' and now you are behind on organising stock. Your boss doesn't want to listen to your explanation.*

You could break this problem into parts:

- *Your co-workers are not doing their jobs properly*
- *You need to complete your own work*
- *You got told off, which wasn't fair; it could impact on you keeping your job or getting a promotion in the future*

## 5. Brainstorm and come up with a several possible solutions



Brainstorm a list of possible solutions to your problem. Put down anything that comes to mind and then go over the list and narrow it down to the best possibilities. Having several options leads to achieving the best results. If you've broken your problem down into parts, you could use those to help you brainstorm solutions.

Sticking with the above clothing store example, let's look at possible solutions:

**Problem:** *Your co-workers are not doing their jobs properly*

**Possible Solution:** *Talk to your co-workers about what happened. Explain that you got into trouble for trying to help them out. Get their side of the story. Tell them that, while you're happy to help, you need to focus on your own job first.*

**Problem:** *You need to complete your own work*

**Possible Solution:** *Make sure you get your own job done first before helping others.*

**Problem:** *You got told off, which wasn't fair; it could impact on you keeping your job or getting a promotion in the future*

**Solution:** *Talk with your boss about what happened later in the day when things have quieted down. Explain that you were trying to help your co-workers in the front of the shop because you thought this would be a priority. Tell your boss that, from now on, you'll focus on getting your own job done first before helping in other areas.*

## 6. Decide which solution fits the situation best

Look at your brainstormed solutions and weigh up your options. Think about what solution is going to be best for the situation. Consider which option is going to cause the least amount of damage for you and for other people. Try to really think about the consequences, imagine the future and what could happen.



## 7. Ask questions

If you're unsure about anything when you're trying to solve a problem, *ask someone*.

You need to make an informed and educated decision, not one based on assumptions or feelings.

You also need to ask yourself: *Am I making this choice because of a biased feeling?*

## 8. Ask for advice

When trying to solve a problem, you need to do some research to find information to help guide you into making the right decision.

Sometimes this means you need to ask someone with experience for advice, someone who can point you in the right direction and help you make the best choice.



## 9. Evaluation

It's always good to look back and see if your problem was solved. If it was, then you know what to do in the future. If it didn't go exactly to plan, then have a think about what could be done better or differently to solve the problem next time.

