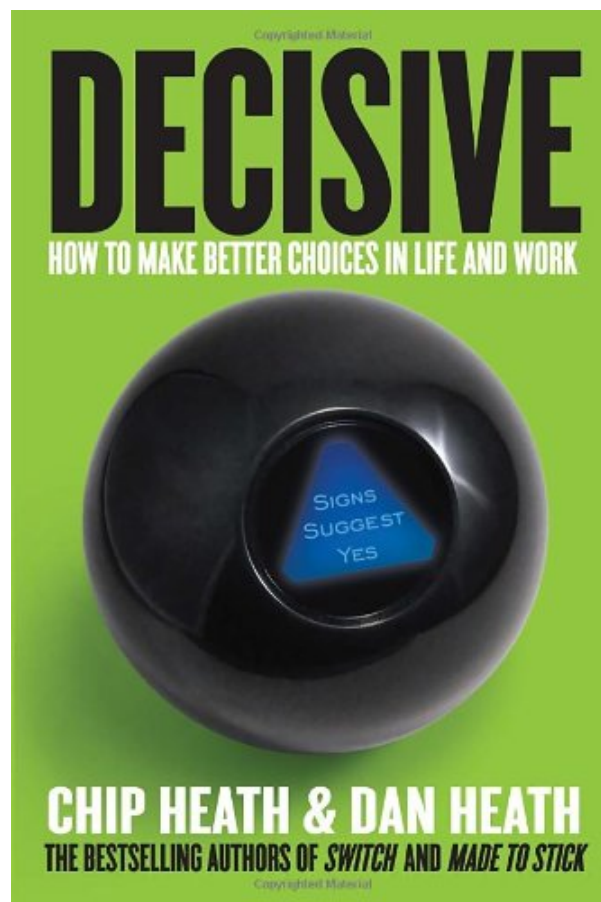
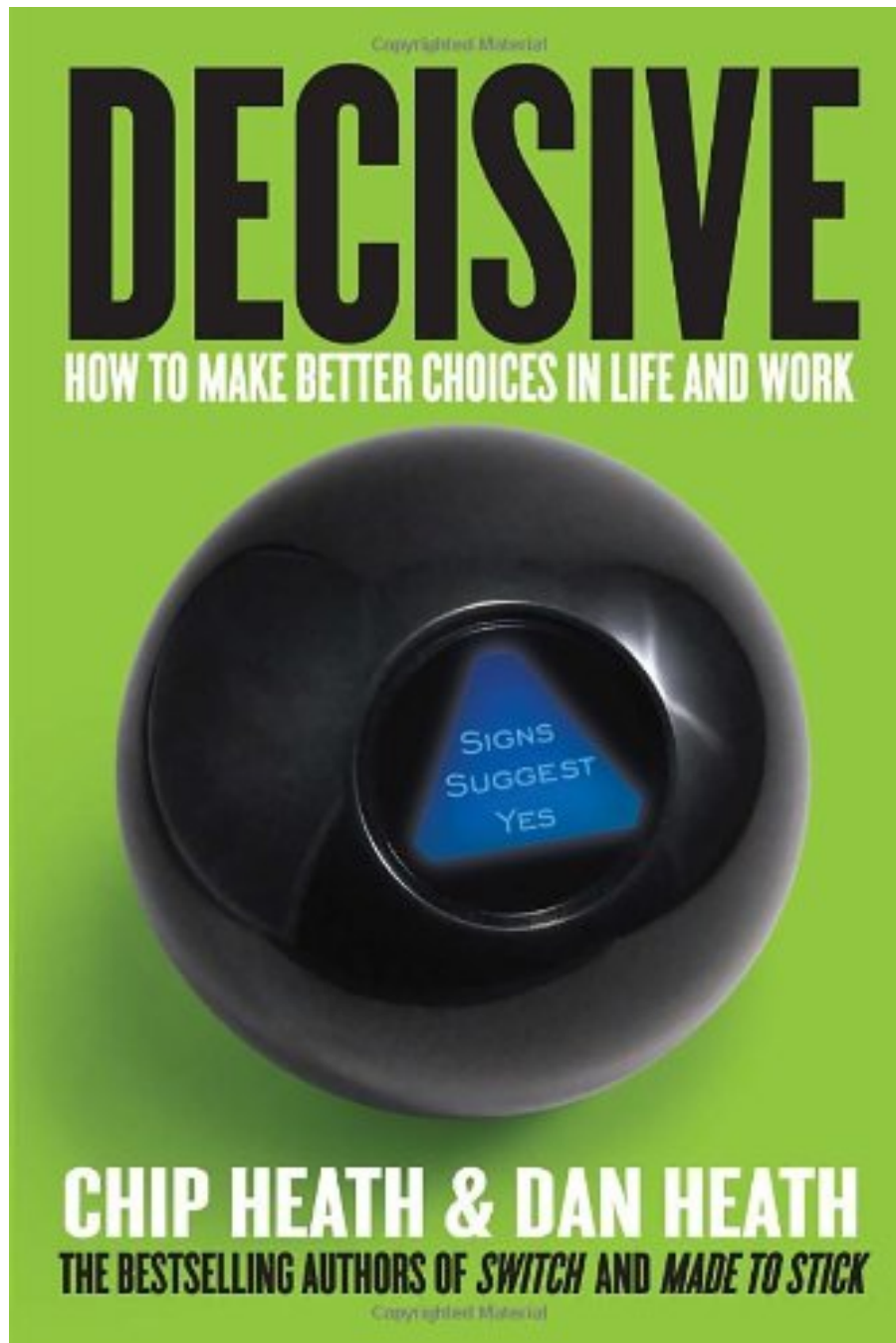


DECISIVE: HOW TO MAKE BETTER CHOICES IN LIFE AND WORK BY CHIP HEATH, DAN HEATH



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Amazon.com Review

Q&A with Chip Heath & Dan Heath

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Q. So how do I help my teenage son not to make a bad choice?

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Chip and Dan Heath, the bestselling authors of *Switch* and *Made to Stick*, tackle one of the most critical topics in our work and personal lives: how to make better decisions.

?

Research in psychology has revealed that our decisions are disrupted by an array of biases and irrationalities: We're overconfident. We seek out information that supports us and downplay information that doesn't. We get distracted by short-term emotions. When it comes to making choices, it seems, our brains are flawed instruments. Unfortunately, merely being aware of these shortcomings doesn't fix the problem, any more than knowing that we are nearsighted helps us to see. The real question is: How can we do better?

In *Decisive*, the Heaths, based on an exhaustive study of the decision-making literature, introduce a four-step process designed to counteract these biases. Written in an engaging and compulsively readable style, *Decisive* takes readers on an unforgettable journey, from a rock star's ingenious decision-making trick to a CEO's disastrous acquisition, to a single question that can often resolve thorny personal decisions.

Along the way, we learn the answers to critical questions like these: How can we stop the cycle of agonizing over our decisions? How can we make group decisions without destructive politics? And how can we ensure that we don't overlook precious opportunities to change our course??

Decisive is the Heath brothers' most powerful—and important—book yet, offering fresh strategies and practical tools enabling us to make better choices. Because the right decision, at the right moment, can make all the difference.

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- Published on: 2013-03-26
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Most helpful customer reviews

154 of 164 people found the following review helpful.

A Helpful Guide to Making Better Decisions

By Mike Mertens

I highly recommend *Decisive* as a valuable aid to making more objective decisions. The Heath Brothers do a great job laying out a better and more memorable process for making decisions while illustrating the principles with a wide variety of examples. They begin by discussing how the normal decision making process proceeds in 4 steps, each of which has a "villain" that can negatively impact it. To quote from their introduction:

- * You encounter a choice. But narrow framing makes you miss options.
- * You analyze your options. But the confirmation bias leads you to gather self-serving information.
- * You make a choice. But short-term emotion will often tempt you to make the wrong one.
- * Then you live with it. But you'll often be overconfident about how the future will unfold

They spend the remainder of the book detailing a process to make better decisions - the WRAP process:

- * Widen your options
- * Reality Test Your Assumptions
- * Attain Some Distance
- * Prepare to Be Wrong

Each part of the process has several powerful ideas that are worth chewing on and implementing in the context of one's life. I have chosen a few of the ideas to give you a flavor of what is in store:

For widening your options, it is important to avoid a narrow frame. In order to make sure you challenge yourself to do this, they propose an idea called the Vanishing Options Test - what would you do if the current alternatives disappeared? Here is a key quote: "When people imagine that they cannot have an option, they are forced to move their mental spotlight elsewhere - really move it - often for the first time in a long while." For Reality testing your assumptions. They have a chapter on "consider the opposite" - and there is an approach from Roger Martin that recommends for each option you are looking at, ask yourself "What would have to be true for this option to be the right answer?" This is an especially powerful concept in a business context where sides may be talking past each other - this helps reset the context to analyzing the options rather than arguing past each other.

In attaining some distance, they cover a simple but powerful question that is really helpful for a personal decision (though it applies in business contexts as well). The question is: "What would I tell my best friend to do in this situation?"

For preparing to be wrong, they cover the idea of a tripwire - something to make us come back and revisit the decision. This helps in making sure that past decisions get revisited periodically. This is especially important in reminding us that we have a choice in our actions and we are free to revisit those decisions we made in the past to make sure they are still meeting our needs. I find this important for reminding myself to remain actively engaged rather than passively falling into the status quo.

There are many other powerful techniques and ideas spread throughout the book. Some of my favorites are: prevention versus promotion focus, zoom out/zoom in, ooching, and pre-mortems. I highly recommend purchasing the book and integrating its concepts into your life in order to make better decisions.

Here are a few related thoughts and items that others may find interesting:

For reality testing your assumptions, see Richard Feynman's "Cargo Cult Science" article (freely available on the internet)

I have found the book *Making Great Decisions in Business and Life* by David Henderson and Charles L

Hooper to be helpful as well. An interesting course on decision making is also made available by the Teaching Company (the course is taught by Michael Roberto who is mentioned in the book in the section on Recommendations for Further Reading)

For a powerful article on choices and values, see David Kelley's article "I Don't Have To" (also available freely on the internet)

The March 2013 Harvard Business Review has an article by Heidi Grant Halvorson and E. Tory Higgins related to prevention and promotion mindsets

Please note that this review is based on an advance copy (Uncorrected Proof) of the book that the authors made available via their website (a "secret" buried in a David Lee Roth story about tripwires). I enjoyed the book so much that I pre-ordered the hardcover right after finishing the advanced copy

152 of 164 people found the following review helpful.

Good ideas delivered in a heavy, indirect and lengthy discussion.

By Mark P. McDonald

Chip and Dan Heath are known for writing insightful and approachable books like Switch. Their new book, Decisive does not follow this pattern. That simple statement required me to make a decision about this review. Writing a less than stellar review is often a challenge eliciting negative feedback when sharing reasons why something did not live up to your expectations or was worth the time to read.

We all make decisions and the top of making better decisions should have been a slam-dunk. While Decisive does deliver, particularly in the first few chapters, overall the messages in this book get lost. The book is too long, heavy and complex to be helpful, particularly covering a subject already treated by others.

The core messages of the book are sound and helpful. The book covers recognizes the challenges we face in making decisions:

- > Forcing an either/or decision when its not needed
- > Confirmation bias, when we seek and see only the data that supports our views
- > Removing emotion from the decision making process
- > Overconfidence in decision making that limits our ability to consider alternative

The answers to these challenges are a pop acronym WRAP that describes their four-step process to making better decisions.

- > Widen your options
- > Reality test your assumptions
- > Attain distance before deciding
- > Prepare to be wrong

These are commonsense and helpful ideas. They are the basis for an easy to understand, actionable set of tools, you are right. This is a case where the structure and prose gets in the way as the book uses 11 chapters to cover each letter of WRAP. Each chapter goes through a review of other people's books, psychology studies and stories around a particular sub-aspect of each letter. Much of the content of these chapters will be familiar to readers of other books about decision-making.

In my opinion this book should have been 200 pages not 300. Focus would give the read more value by delivering less prose. The decision to deliver less would have meant so much more.

The best part of this book is the first few chapters, those related to widening your options. These chapters reflect the spirit of Chip and Dan Heath's earlier books. The logic is clearer, the actions more practical, and the explanations more accessible. After those first few chapters, the prose grows in heavier, the stories while interesting become a little confusing in large part because of their number and the book becomes less readable or interesting. It seems like the authors fell into the Gladwell trap and tried to write a Malcolm Gladwell book, which was probably a poor decision.

Strengths

- > Focusing on decision-making is an important and timely topic and one that we all need to keep in mind.
- > The book concentrates on personal decision-making, the ones we make as individuals and consumers more than the ones we make as business leaders and citizens. Since we make personal decisions all the time it makes it easy to test and apply the ideas right away.

Challenges

- > The book is rather generic to the sense that many of the ideas are obvious and much of this ground has already been covered by the likes of Dan Ariely, Johan Lehrer and Daniel Pink. Chip and Dan Heath are latecomers to the subject area and do more to repeat and repackage rather than introduce new ideas.
- > The story examples, while helpful, bog the book down; require you to wade through what the authors want you to read rather than enabling you to jump ahead to the information you want.
- > The structure of the chapters and numbered subsections with chapters are not particularly helpful and chop up the book. If the authors were trying to make the book more like reading a blog, then the missed as the subsections are too long and indirect.

Overall, recommended if you have the time and have not read any other books on decision making. In that case, this content will be new and helpful. If you have already read other decision related books, then I might put this one lower on the priority list.

80 of 88 people found the following review helpful.

Heath Brothers Hit Another Home Run

By Aaron Johnson

Here are 3 aspects I've appreciated about Decisive

Readability: No one writes non-fiction business books like these guys. In parts, Decisive is hard to put down. If you've read Made to Stick, you'll see the authors practicing what they preach by applying their SUCCES principles to the format of this book (if you haven't read it, then get it).

Gives You Language: Three of us in our department at work got a copy of Decisive and it comes up in conversation everyday. The Heath brothers have given us language like: "ooching", "setting tripwires", "widen our options," "narrow framing, and "What would have to be true for this to be the best option?" This is kind of language has the power to shape the culture of an organization.

Researched: I love the footnotes! Decisive is full of credible examples, and you can tell that the authors and their research team put in hundreds of hours exploring the topic of decision making. The result is a litany of real-life examples and the results of research studies put into layman's terms.

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