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# 4 STEPS TO MAKING A GOOD DECISION



A 30-MINUTE,  
TRIED-AND-TESTED,  
STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS  
THAT WILL HELP YOU MAKE YOUR  
NEXT IMPORTANT DECISION.

# DAN WILT

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**A 30-Minute, Tried-And-Tested, Step-By-Step Process**

**That Will Help You Make Your Next Important Decision**

Dan Wilt

## **DEDICATION**

Dedicated To You.

Your life is the sum of the decisions you make as you face each success and failure that will greet you in life.

Your choices, small and large, can be Heroic. Courageous. Confident. Hopeful. Others-centered. Inspired.

May this little book help you, again and again, with each decision.

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## INTRODUCTION

**4 STEPS TO MAKING A GOOD DECISION** is a short ebook designed to quickly teach you a 4-step process that will help you make the next good decision you need to make.

By “good” decision, I mean that you will make a better decision by following this simple process than you would have made if you did not follow it. I am confident of that.

Ultimately, making your next good decision will be up to you, and how good that decision seems *after* you’ve made it will depend on how thoroughly you followed this process, your attitude, the circumstances surrounding that decision, and your ongoing ability to turn any decision you’ve made toward a good outcome.

In other words, I can’t make the decision you are about to make for you – and neither can anyone else who says they can. But I can give you a process for making your decision that is tried-and-tested by me and many others. It is a process that you can make your own – and return to again and again over a lifetime of decisions.

### **A Little Help From A Monk**

Some of the core ideas in this little book are inspired by the great Ignatius of Loyola – the founder of the Jesuit order of monks. After years of personal experience learning to make “spiritual decisions” in the 1500s, Ignatius created patterns for how others could learn to make better decisions.

While his patterns and ideas aimed at helping people make “spiritual” decisions, there are many principles we can glean from the procedures he followed. Ignatius had an elaborate pattern for processing decisions that he called the “discerning of spirits.”

He was convinced that God has a plan for each of our lives, and that we can learn to discern each choice in light of that calling. He also believed that our hearts, and our lives, are not static. They are dynamic.

### **Making Decisions Is A Dynamic Activity**

In other words, you and I can’t make decisions based on some unchanging, objective criteria – like doing a math equation. Life is a moving target, and we can only, at our best, use principles to help us navigate the nuances of each decision we must make.

Like an airplane, our goal in making decisions over our lifetime is *not* perfection – no airplane is perfectly on course all the time. Rather, an airplane is designed to navigate

the air currents, accommodate the weather patterns, and consider other airplanes each time it takes flight. With the right instruments, the right training, and the best machinery working, the airplane stands a much better chance of arriving at its destination every single time.

## **Good Decisions vs. Perfect Decisions**

As my pilot friend tells me, an airplane is off course 90% of the time. The vocation, or “calling,” of the airplane is to reach the destination, navigating the changes and taking the most direct, straight path to the goal possible.

Applying the metaphor to decision-making, our goal is not to make *perfect* decisions. Rather, our goal is to make *good* decisions, accommodating the winds, weather, and activity all around us.

Making good decisions means that we need some tools, outside training, and the right machinery to get us to our destination. This little book hopes to be a small part of your “destination-reaching-toolkit” over a lifetime.

## **What Decision Do You Have To Make Right Now?**

You probably have a decision that needs to be made right now. You can use the pattern offered in this book to make that decision. Once you get used to it, you can apply it to decision after decision.

You can apply this simple, 4-step process to decisions about:

*A relationship,*

*A home you'd like to buy,*

*A move to another location,*

*A job or career path,*

*A new product purchase (at TV, a washing machine, a car),*

*Which school you should attend,*

*Whether or not you should adopt a child, or to*

*Any circumstance in which you have a choice affecting the outcome.*

Simply carve out 30 minutes, and follow these pages.

## **Some Final Thoughts On How You Approach All Your Decision-Making**

No one can guarantee that everything will turn out okay for you once you make your decision. There are thousands of factors that influence how a decision turns out, and neither you nor I have control over each one.

What you can control, however, is *how* you approach your decision.

Thousands of people around you, connected to your life, are making decisions out of their intuition, feelings, input from others, and a whole truckload of impulses they learned growing up.

The truth is that many of those decisions are just *bad*; the people have not stopped to do a process like this, and they are just running on their own best guesses. I've done that, and you may have also.

Sadly, our families often don't equip us for the lifelong art of effective decision-making. In many ways, this little book was written to help my children, nieces, nephews and family members make better decisions.

A process can help us be better at decision-making. This particular process represents a healthier approach to making a choice than simply doing it based on our best guess – or worse yet, our raw emotions.

So, the only direction is up.

## **Your Next Better Decision Is Your Next Good Decision**

Making a better decision than you might have, running off the raw materials of your upbringing and experience, is a good decision in my opinion. Why? Because a good decision is one that you've thought through, cared about, reflected on, weighed, and acted on with your best resources, information, and faculties available to you.

If you apply the following 4-step process to a current decision, and it ends up being one you make after careful reflection, considered options, weighing the pros and cons, and confirming through others who have insights and vested interest in the situation, then you will have truly made a "good" decision with the best resources in front of you.

Making that pattern an internalized habit will then yield better, more informed, more circumspect decisions the rest of your life. Even your "quick" decisions will get better.

## **What I Personally Believe About Our Decisions**

As I said, I cannot control the outcome of your decision any more than you can. Life is one big mix of choices (expected and unexpected), influences (chosen and unchosen), situations (foreseen and unforeseen) and, I believe, *the presence of a bigger plan for our lives that is beyond our sight*.

Time after time I have experienced one of my seemingly poorer decisions leading to a circumstance that I would define as strangely and subtly miraculous (some say serendipitous). That circumstance yielded another opportunity, and an opportunity to make a better decision than I did the first time.

Like looking at a radar screen, I can see how one decision affected another, and how my life was orchestrated to bring together my greatest failures and greatest successes into one, big picture of Grace.

So, I want to say at the beginning that you will see in these pages that I believe the best decisions are made when we consider that our lives don't just begin and end with who we are and what we want. They belong to Someone. For that reason, I will note prayer as part of the decision-making process.

Please note that you do not need to believe what I have just said for this decision-making process to help you. However, I believe our decisions are deeply affected by our belief-systems, and this area of belief, for me, has made all the difference in discerning the "next right steps" for my family and I.

In my experience, the sooner we acknowledge that our life is a mysterious interweaving of our daily decisions and the unseen hand of God guiding us through each one, the sooner we will learn how to make good decisions without completely relying on ourselves.

In other words, while you do not need to be a praying person to follow this 4-step process, I will suggest at the start that the decisions you make will be better ones if you invite God into your process.

## **Decision Making Always Has Risks That Research Can Minimize**

I've been applying this pattern for many years. After my own 35 years of decision-making, in my home as a husband and father and in my own successful small business, the school of hard knocks has taught me that I simply cannot foresee everything that will occur after I make each decision – and neither can anyone else.



We just want to get ahead of the game if we can. If we become aware of what we can know before making a decision, then what we can't know won't have as big of an impact on the quality of our decision.

If we do our homework on a decision, if we do our research well, we can *minimize the risk* – and can even mitigate the damage that occurs if that decision turns out to be impacted by something highly unforeseen (like the economy falling through, our boss changing, the death of someone we love, or a financial need we couldn't foresee).

Many people approach big decisions without gathering all the research they need to make that decision. I have met people who are actually afraid to research a company, a school, or a job precisely because *they don't want to be confused by the facts*.

Gather the facts. Gather input from people seasoned and wise in this area in which you are making a decision. Check prices on the Internet. Delay decisions that feel like they are driven by impulse (this 4-step process is the perfect delay for impulsive decision-makers).

The more you bring to the table of this process, the *clearer your thinking will be*.

### **All Things Can Work Together For The Good**

I have watched people make bad decisions that were made better in the end by the kindness and grace of others entering the picture. In these cases, I have been grateful for good, healthy community around us.

I have personally made good decisions that, due to unforeseen circumstances, turned out to seem very bad in the end. In these cases, I have been grateful that God has a higher plan for us than just to see us live out our own little version of "happy."

In those cases, I could see that my character needed some deep forming that was difficult to embrace in the moment of my "crash," but in the end turned out to make me a stronger, more giving human being.

There is a little Bible verse that I love related to decision-making.

"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28 NIV).

If we can embrace that our lives have a *purpose* – one that ends in loving God and being a part of his best plan for our lives, then even our failures can bring us to an opportunity for personal and spiritual renewal.

In this case, we aren't afraid of the effects of a bad decision being random, permanent, and inescapable. We lean into grace, hope, and the possibility that even our great trials will train us to be more thankful, remarkable human beings.

## **Ready? Let's Make A Decision**

So, take a deep breath, and apply the following 4-step process to the next small or big decision you need to make.

You'll need these tools to follow this process:

### **Tool #1 - A journal or pad of paper**

When I make decisions, I like to use my private journal, which has non-lined paper, so that I can draw circles, ovals, lines, and anything I like. I am a visual, "mind-map" thinker, so small circles with little lines connecting them to one another works better to help me think than a page with lines and lists.

Determine what works best for you, and get it on the table.

### **Tool #2 - A good pen**

You're going to be writing a lot of things down, so have a good pen at the ready (with a color of ink that doesn't stress you out). I happen to be color-deficient (some call it colorblind), in that I don't see light colors, or colors with red or green hues, very well.

I have a certain thickness of black ink pen that I like to use for writing and drawing in my journal (I even know the brand!).

You're going to be in a 30-minute process, and your pen running out of ink is an added frustration you don't need. Trust me; removing every obstacle possible is a good thing when making decisions.

### **Tool #3 - A relaxing environment**

Many people try to make good decisions while they fly along through the day, leaving all their normal interrupters and pace untouched. They've learned to

make flash decisions as they roll along, using intuition and quick-thinking skills to get the job done.

In some cases, they succeed. In others, they fail miserably (it's like a businessman making a good decision for his business, but it turns out to be a horrible decision for his family – it happens all the time).

Distraction is your decision-making enemy, in this process.

Turn your mobile phone off. Turn the main phones in your house off. Turn off the TV and the radio. You need to be uninterruptible, as far as is possible. (Just as we don't text and drive, we don't text and thrive when making good decisions!).

Find a comfortable chair. Get a cup of coffee or tea (whatever calms you so you can reflect), and set the temperature in the room to something comfortable.

Note: If you're making a decision as a couple with someone else, make sure the environment works for both of you, and you don't need to get up constantly. Both people should have their phones powered off, and a separate journal or pad for personal notes.

I.e. Use the personal journal for your own processing, but then work off of one journal/pad when it comes to discussing the decision together and writing during each of these steps.

## **STEP 1: WHAT IS THE DECISION YOU NEED TO MAKE? (5 min.)**

**ACTION: Name the exact decision you are about to make.**

We are ready to begin.

Grab your journal. This first step is the hook on which the rest of this process hangs. It's worth a few minutes of your time to clarify just exactly what the decision is you are attempting to make.

If you're like me, many times I have not actually defined the exact decision that I must make before I try to make it. I may have a number of "factors" buzzing through my brain, which may actually each be a smaller decision that must be made before I can make the big one.

In this first step, you are going to write down the exact decision that you are making.

### **Some Pre-Questions Before You Write It Down**

*"Is this the biggest decision I am making, or is the decision I think I need to make actually part of a bigger one? (Ex. Are you asking 'Which college should I attend,' or 'Should I even attend college?')"*

*"Am I actually needing to make this decision right now, or am I self-imposing a sense of urgency on something that is not actually urgent?"*

*"Is someone else pressuring me to make this decision now, when I could actually wait for a number of other reasons?"*

*"Am I able to make this decision with the resources currently available to me? In other words, must I wait – either for more information or must I do some research before I dive in?"*

### **Write The Specific Decision Down.**

Now, in the shortest sentence possible, write down the decision you are making at the top of your journal page.

Use one of the following examples to help you craft your sentence.

*I am deciding if I should attend (name a specific college) next fall.*

*I am deciding if I should accept this offer for a new job.*

*I am deciding if I should invest in this big screen TV right now.*

*I am deciding if I should take this relationship to a new level.*

*I am deciding if we should move to this new city.*

*I am deciding if I need to start this new business.*

*I am deciding if I should be self-employed or work for someone else.*

*I am deciding if I should say yes to this marriage proposal.*

Here are examples of poorly written decision sentences. These do not work.

*I am deciding which college I should attend next fall (not specific).*

*I am deciding if I should look for a better job (not specific; do research).*

*I am deciding if I should get into a relationship right now (with who?).*

*I am deciding if I should purchase a car (not specific – which car?)*

The list can go on and on. Be specific. Name your decision, and write it at the top of your journal page.

## **STEP 2: WHAT ARE MY ATTACHMENTS? (10 min.)**

### **ACTION: Name the hidden attachments you have to certain outcomes.**

One of the great geniuses of Ignatius' process of decision making was that he encouraged people to examine their "attachments" to certain outcomes. In other words, we bring many unspoken, pre-conceived preferences to decisions that we often never say out loud. In this step, we're going to unearth our attachments and say them out loud.

In marriage, or in decisions where another also has a vested stake in the outcome, this can be devastating. Everything needs to get out in the open, so it can be weighed to see if it's helpful to the decision. Attachments are connected to our hidden values, and getting in touch with our values is a necessary, but painful, part of good decision-making.

In this section, you're going to find out where your heart is actually leaning, and why.

(Note: In some cases, your attachments will help you make a good decision. In other cases, your attachments will be in the way of the best decision you could make.)

We allot 10 minutes to this process so you can really get to the heart of the matter – the matters of the heart – related to your decision. Read the following, then do the next step.

### **Get In Touch With Your Feelings, Thoughts, And Desires**

Your feelings, thoughts, and desires will have something to do with your ability to make a good decision. But our feelings, thoughts, and desires can come from many positive and negative places, including:

our moods,

others' opinions,

our fears,

our past experiences (good and bad),

emotions from our upbringing related to decisions,

unrestrained desires,

God,  
passions,  
inaccurate opinions about ourselves (either too high or too low),  
anger,  
greed,  
lack of trust,  
intuition,  
pride,  
and more.

### **Attitudes To Think About Before You List Your Attachments**

Ignatius suggested that there were 7 qualities of the heart that could ensure a more accurate process of discernment when making a decision. Warren Sazama, S.J., draws out the following categories from Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises. (See [here](#) for Sazama's excellent article on Ignatian decision-making.) I'll draw on these categories, and make them pertinent to us for this step.

As you read through the following, you are preparing yourself to name your attachments. Take a few minutes and ask yourself:

"Which of these attitudes is present, or absent, in my heart?"

#### **Am I open to any possible outcome?**

Do I have an open heart, and an open mind, as I walk toward this decision? Or am I closed-minded, with an outcome I'm looking for that I'm subtly bringing to this process? Is my mind made up, and am I pushing this process toward that end? Is that "silent conclusion" pressuring someone else who seems to be pushing back on where I am leaning on this decision?

Action: Begin to let go. It will confuse the process if you don't start clean.

### **Am I willing to follow a path that may be God's will?**

A generous spirit says that we are willing for God to speak anything into the decision that might be unknown to us, that might further purposes that have something to do with divine plans, but less to do with our happiness (Mother Theresa chose to leave a good teaching job to care for the poor masses in Calcutta). How willing are you to let go of the reigns in your life?

Action: Offer your life to God.

### **Am I courageous enough to take a risk?**

Decisions almost always involve some form of *risk*. It is silly for us to think otherwise, though some people spend their entire lives making the most safe, predictable decisions they can – never realizing that their hunger for safety is actually a veiled cowardice that keeps them chained to the familiar.

Are you courageous as you face this decision? Are you ready for the remarkable, the risky, the unfamiliar to possibly enter the equation? Your final decision may not be to choose be the riskiest option, but are you open if it is?

Action: Take a deep breath and be willing to risk.

### **Am I free on the inside to make this decision?**

Are you all tied up inside, or are you free to act on the decision you are about to make? Are you constantly waffling, bound up by fear and frozen in your steps because you don't want to do something that will be unpopular with others or scary for you? Are you afraid of hurting someone's feelings? Are you ready to forfeit your future so that someone doesn't "feel badly" for a short time?

Action: Set yourself free to make this decision.

### **Am I prayerfully reflecting on this decision and seeking spiritual counsel?**

If you are a person of faith, this attitude is vital to your decision. Some people



frantically ask God to speak to them (usually asking for miraculous, Technicolor, clear-as-crystal indicators) about his will in their situation. Rather than waiting for a big decision to trigger prayer in their life, people who make good decisions are often prayerful as an *ongoing habit* in their life.

In other words, being prayerful about a decision is just an extension of their normal, listening life – rather than being an unfamiliar, special cry for an answer. A cultivated life of prayer makes us more inclined to hear an unusual answer when it comes to our next decision. (Ignatius’ “[Daily Examen](#)” is a perfect way to cultivate this kind of prayerful reflection at the end of each day.)

Action: Learn to be a praying decision-maker.

### **Are my priorities in order?**

Sometimes our priorities are just plain out of whack. We are thinking more about a bigger home and making more money than about the inner welfare of our children. We are lost in our need for a job where others compliment us in our social network, hungering for affirmation when we should be getting our affirmation from an internal source instead of others.

Maybe that new TV screen is a misplaced priority, or maybe it’s a shared desire in the family that will nurture greater joys in family time.

Are you seeing straight? Wanting the best for everyone affected by the decision? It’s important to ask this question. Sometimes honestly asking someone who knows us well (a spouse or dear friend) can what others perceive as our real priorities. While the answers may hurt for a moment, asking others who know us well is worth doing when making a big decision.

Action: Re-order your private world.

### **Am I seeing the right ends vs. means?**

This goes with the one above. Strange as it may sound, your family is not a means for you to be fulfilled as a spouse or parent. Your family is an end in itself, and must never become an unspoken bridge to your own sense of well-being.

If we don't identify our "end" confusions, like the example above, we may live our lives vicariously through our children, through our job, through our relationships, or through the lives of celebrities. Our identity and goals will be out of whack. So will our decision-making.

Know what makes you tick, and why it makes you tick. Self-sacrifice is just part of being a good human being, and it's a part of good decision-making.

Action: Determine what the "ends" are in your life.

### **Now, Write Down Your Attachments**

Write down each attachment that comes to mind. Again, some attachments are good, but others can have a deadening effect on vibrant, courageous, dynamic decision-making.

One last time, let's ask this. Have you, in the quiet of your heart, put stipulations on the decision? For example, here are some hidden attachments that could be in the way.

"I'll go anywhere to college (but it has to be in driving distance of my home)."

"I'll pursue this new entrepreneurial dream (but it has to pay \$60K in the first year)."

"I'll consider buying this house (if my parents don't disapprove in any way)."

What are your "as long as" or "if, however" attachments? After you write them down, if you're a person of prayer, offer each one to God with trust and release. Jesus prayed, "Not my will, but yours be done."

This is a good prayer to pray at the end of your attachments work here.

### **STEP 3: WHAT ARE THE PROS AND CONS? (10 min.)**

#### **ACTION: It's time to make your list.**

Having named your decision, and having examined your attachments, you're ready to begin adding a pros-and-cons list to your process.

Without first examining our attachments, many people begin making a pros and cons list from a skewed perspective, leaning one way before giving the other a chance in the decision.

It is so important we work hard to be aggressive in getting our attachments out on the table, and being as objective as we can be. So many couples struggle to make a pros and cons list because an unspoken leaning is already occurring in one of the participants.

Sometimes this attachment causes a person to "push a decision through" until the other person accommodates or gives in completely. Then, I've seen many decisions backfire because an honest discussion was never given airtime – a hidden decision was already made that didn't give any breathing room to an alternate or compromising idea.

#### **Make Two Lists, One For Each Opposing Option**

Write down the two directions the decision could go at the top of a column (each, typically 2 columns). For example, "I take that job" and "I don't take that job."

Write "Pros" beneath each option, and leave some space for 4-5 points beneath it. Then, some way down, write "Cons" and leave space beneath that.

Start with one column, and flesh out the Pros and Cons. Then, after 5 minutes, move to the next column.

To do this, turn on your imagination. *Imagine you have made that decision at the top of the column.*

Ignatius even suggested that you imagine yourself at your own funeral, having made that decision. Are you happy with what people are saying about that decision you made? Or, imagine that someone else is sitting across from you, about to make that decision – what would you tell them about the Pros and Cons?

Visualize you, living out that decision, in your mind. What are the Pros that come to mind? What are the Cons? Sit with each, the Pros and Cons, for a few minutes. Exhaust any ideas you have.

Use these words to help you trigger new Pros and Cons.

*Financial status change*

*Short term or long term commitment*

*Flexibility (or lack of)*

*Family impact*

*Personal emotional impact*

*Personal spiritual impact*

*Impact on spouse*

*Impact on children*

*Impact on future possibilities*

*What are friends with experience and insight in this area saying?*

*If everything went great, what would be a positive outcome I could imagine?*

### **Give Equal Energy To The Other List**

Now, try it the other way around. Imagine you have made the opposite decision of the one you just listed out. What are the Pros and Cons of not following through on the first idea?

### **Review Your Pros And Cons Lists**

At the bottom of your page, write down the decision that most resonates with you after you have discerned and expressed your attachments, and then evaluated the amounts and quality of the pros and cons you listed.

One of your possible decisions should begin to emerge as the real winner. If not, go back and review all of your attachments again, and then review your Pros and Cons lists.

## **STEP 4: MAKE YOUR QUALITY DECISION (5 min.)**

### **ACTION: Make a decision.**

You've named the specific decision. You've reviewed your attitudes and emotions. You've defined your attachments, and gotten them on the table. You've identified the Pros and Cons of each possible option.

You've written down the decision that seems to be emerging from your reflection. Does that mean you're finished? No.

### **Give the decision time to settle.**

If you have the time to do it, give it a few days, then review everything you wrote down. Go through the process, in your head and heart again, as you read through what you wrote.

Lingering a few days over the decision can give it time to "settle." Then, you can evaluate your feelings about the decision, as you review your notes one final time.

Invest prayer into the decision daily, and every time you think about it. Ask God to show you the best decision to make.

Then, it's time to make a call.

### **You can decide not to decide right now.**

You can make the decision to go with what seemed best from this process. You can also decide you need to do more research, spend more time, and redo this process later. The process might reveal something you hadn't thought about before.

You could also decide *not to decide*. Now may simply not be the time to make this decision, and your 4-step process revealed the prematurity of making it now.

These are all "decisions about the decision."

### **Be Intentional and Proactive.**

Once you've given due thought to this process, pull the trigger and make the call. Be intentional moving forward, not allowing every single voice that speaks to talk you out of what you've decided.

Be proactive, applying your energies to make sure you give that decision your best shot.

With your ear open to good counsel, and to those mature thinkers (teenagers still have the frontal lobe of their brain forming in their decision-making abilities, by the way) affected most by the decision.

***With a trusting heart, move forward.***

## A FINAL WORD FROM THE AUTHOR

There it is; you've made a decision. Well done. Ride forward with confidence, and keep your notes handy for reference as you go.

Also, keep this little book handy for each decision you need to make, until it becomes a part of you. Then you can go through the steps in your mind when a new decision faces you.

I truly hope this little 4-Step method of decision-making will serve you and yours for many decades to come. Enhance the steps here with steps of your own, ones that match who you are and the kinds of needs you have when making choices.

If you have children, gift this ebook to them so they are not left to themselves to figure out how to make big decisions. We want our children to succeed, and having a tool for making decisions is one way we can help secure their future.

It's been a gift to share with you, and I regard it as a privilege to remain in touch if you would like. Visit my blog at [www.DanWilt.com](http://www.DanWilt.com) to stay connected.

Also, would you be kind enough to leave a brief review and rating of this book on Amazon or iTunes for me? It helps let others know about the useful tool of this book, and I would be very grateful.

Again, may Grace lead you in all your decisions.

With Joy,

Dan Wilt  
Author, *4 Steps To Making A Good Decision*

For more books by Dan, see

[www.DanWiltBooks.com](http://www.DanWiltBooks.com)

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