

make decisions?

Article by an experienced careers adviser

How do you make key decisions in your life? Are you a careful planner, do you go by what feels right, or perhaps you decide something on the 'spur of the moment'? How many decisions do you end up regretting?

Of course, we have to make decisions all the time – what to wear, what to eat, what to watch on TV – and we make these choices each day, often with little thought. Getting these wrong may cause a fashion disaster but we know they are unlikely to have a lasting effect. Other decisions, such as whether we want to go to university or the type of career we want to pursue, are more critical and can have a lasting impact on our future.

We all approach decision-making in various ways, and this can be influenced by factors such as our personality, how those around us make decisions, how confident we feel, how independent we are, our level of stress, and the extent we feel destiny plays a part in life. Here are a number of common styles we use:

- **Intuitive** – we go with what feels right. This works better for some than others.
- **Impulsive** – we find a situation stressful and to end indecision, decide to go for a 'I'll just do that' approach.
- **Imitative** – faced with too many options, we feel it's easier to follow what others are doing.
- **Quick win** – we end up choosing the first option that looks satisfactory.
- **Rational** – we consider all the options carefully before choosing.

Perhaps you recognise some of these styles and have used a variety yourself, depending on the situation. None of them necessarily lead to poor decisions, but the risks for some are clear! Although gut reaction or intuition can work, generally a rational approach is considered to lead to better decision-making.

Here is the DARES* model which you can use to help support your decision-making. It doesn't guarantee success, but following it will hopefully set you on the right path to making good, balanced, well-informed decisions.

1. **Define** – identify clearly what decision or decisions you need to make and when you need to start the process. What are the consequences if you don't make a decision?
2. **Analyse** – where am I now? Think carefully about the following:
 - What are your interests?
 - What are your skills?
 - What do you value?
 - What motivates you and where do you want to 'be' (i.e. what are your goals)?

Tip: This is the stage that can feel a bit overwhelming with the amount of information you need to find out. Knowing what to ask, what to look for, and where to start is important. So take time to think how you can best tackle this and ask for help if you need it.

3. **Research** – find out as much information as you can about the different options. Consider which options might suit you and if you can, narrow them down.
4. **Evaluate** – review the options and for each one, list the possible gains, costs, and potential consequences for you and your family. If it helps, try using a 1–10 scale to help you score and weigh up the pros and cons. Make your choice and make sure you have a backup!

Tip: Having researched the options, this is a good time to seek careers advice and talk through your ideas before making a final decision.

5. **Strategy** – work out what you need to do and when. Take action!

Source: Jonathan Geddes, Careers adviser, 2016. * Model based on the CASVE decision-making cycle.