Decision-Making
By Olan Hendrix

A manager has been described as a person who makes decisions; sometimes right ones, sometimes wrong ones, but a manager always makes them. We must not insist on infallibility in decision making for people who work with us, nor in ourselves.

If you are in a place of leadership, you have to make decisions. Hesitancy in deciding will breed demoralization and frustration among your subordinates. The longer it takes a person to get a decision from you, the more encumbered he or she is, and the more you are saying, "Your time and activities are of minimal importance."

Why do we have such difficulties in making decisions? One major reason is the control-orientation of our organization. We would prefer to have everyone involved in the decision than to have the decision made quickly, effectively and thereby accomplish our goal. To make decisions involves risk. Many people hedge on decision making and would prefer to do anything rather than to decide.

Decision-Making Principles
Three principles apply to decision making.

1. *A logical decision can be reached only if the problem is first defined*. There is a vast difference between problem identification and problem solving. Problem solving, comparatively speaking, is easy. Problem identification is extremely difficult. Most of us do not take tie to identify problems. We plunge in to solve them. Problems, because they are related to human beings, are often covered with a façade- one of the chief characteristics of the human being. When you sit down with a man and say, "How are you?" he will seldom tell you right of how he really is. Suppose a person comes to you for counseling. "Tell me what your problem is," you begin. The individual will seldom immediately describe the real problem. Because problems are so intimately entwined with human emotions, we have difficulty facing the heart of the problem. We must be careful to avoid dealing with just the symptoms, while ignoring the real problem. We must persevere to adequately define the problem.
2. *The principle of adequate evidence teaches us that a logical decision must be valid in terms of the evidence on which it is based*. Our problem in God's work is our utter subjectivity which builds a high protective wall around us so that everything about us is immune to the criticism of our colleagues because we have prayed about it, or the Lord has led us. I am not speaking lightly of prayer or divine guidance. But if we are not very careful, this subjectivity can become a protective wall around us to keep us from the truth.
3. *The principle of identity or cope teaches us that facts may appear to differ, depending on the point of view and the point in time from which they are*

observed. In other words, the decisions we make are valid or invalid depending on how and when we look at them. This is why some decisions made today look so stupid tomorrow.

The Logical Thinking Process
The logical thinking process consists of a series of questions. I do not expect that you are going to take these questions and apply them to every decision. But if you can apply them to major decisions, they will help you immeasurably. They will form a pattern in your subconscious mind that can be adapted to various types of problem situations.

1. *What is the apparent problem?* What do you think is the problem? It may not be the real problem.
2. *What are the facts?* Because some of us are exclusively theologically oriented and think we have a pipeline to omniscience, we cannot afford to be bothered with the assimilation of facts. After all, we have revelation! Somebody once asked, "Are you gathering facts or merely rearranging your prejudices?" you need to get the situation factor, the people factor, the place factor, the time factor, the causative factor, and then assimilate all the facts you can.
3. *What is the real problem?* Do not ask this question until you have adequately dealt with the two previous ones. Remember the façade!
4. *What are the possible solutions?* Generally, the possible solutions that emerge spontaneously to mind will be extremes. That is the way we solve problems instinctively. We just get hold of the pendulum and swing as hard as we can from one extreme to the other. These extreme solutions may need to be considered, but do not settle for two alternative and diametrically opposed solutions. *There is always a third solution.* It will seldom manifest itself easily, but do not stop until you find a third solution to the problem. When you find the third, you will often find that it will open up a whole new vista with as fourth, fifth, and sixth possible solution.
5. *Which course of action shall we follow?* This involves implementation of the course chosen. Risk becomes a prime factor. If you have a "safety first" mentality, all of your analysis and fact assimilation will come to nothing here.
    These questions outline the total analysis required by any decision, large or small: Do I really understand the problem? What am I trying to get done? Is this the way to do it? What will go wrong when I put this decision into action?

You are not going to solve one problem without creating others. However, you hope to create lesser problems. Nevertheless, in most problem solving there are some negative consequences. Anticipate them. What is going to go wrong when I put this decision into effect?