

How One Franchise Company President Makes Better, Faster Decisions During Uncertain Times

The five things Tony Libardi of Marco's Pizza does when he's facing a difficult decision.

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When presented with a decision, it's every leader's hope to make the right choice. For some, it can be tough enough to make a decision even under normal circumstances. But more often than not, it's uncertain times that drum up the most complicated and difficult of decisions. This can be particularly challenging when forces outside your control – a recession, global crisis, natural disaster, diagnosis – are now key factors in the decision-making process.

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Business owners, executives, property owners, families and hard-working Americans are all being forced to make difficult decisions right now. And, with so much at stake, how can everyone make sure they're making the best choice for everybody involved? Below are tips that leaders can employ in order to stay level-headed and make the right decisions in face of uncertainty.

Create calm in the chaos

After gathering necessary facts, it's essential that you physically set yourself up for success. The human body is wired to take information from what it sees and act accordingly. For example, if it's in a stressful environment, it reacts by releasing adrenalin and other stress hormones to help it survive the threat. You can see how this might not always be conducive to making a balanced decision. By placing yourself in a more relaxed environment and taking deep breaths to lower your heart rate, you'll have more mental clarity as you weigh your options.

Detect and address your emotions

Now that you've created a sense of calm, it's time to address the personal baggage you're bringing to the decision. One of the worst things to do is to deny that you have a bias, because human beings almost always do. Examine the ways you're emotionally tied to the outcome of the decision, then take a deep dive into each option to see which is most beneficial for the greater good. Analyze with caution and remain at a strategic high level to avoid standing too close to the elephant – an analogy that I use to remind myself that getting too buried into any specific part of a problem hinders my ability to view it as a whole. To avoid this, I envision myself as a fly on the wall looking at the situation from a different perspective other than my own.

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This method was particularly helpful when encouraging our more than 950 Marco's Pizza locations to remain open as an essential businesses amid the crisis. While it would have been easy to let fear of the public health emergency rule the decision-making process, there were so many additional

elements at play. As a people-first, service-oriented business, we remained committed to our mission of making a positive difference in the community. There are individuals from the communities we serve who have been homebound or may be quarantined and unable to visit the grocery store or make their own meals, and we wanted them to know they can count on us.

Break it up

Challenging decisions can often be complex, and if that's what you're up against, try breaking up the issue at hand into several smaller ones. Information overload can cause even the best decision-makers to overlook critical aspects and outcomes of a potential decision. You may also want to try drawing or writing out the problem, as viewing it on paper may help you slice it into more digestible sections.

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For instance, when there's a problem I need to deal with, I'll start by outlining an overall goal: prioritizing the physical and financial health of our team – employees, franchisees and the communities we serve. I then work my way outward addressing pain points along the way, like operational changes for contact-free delivery and curbside carry-out or ensuring all team members feel supported and prepared to accommodate guests and their fellow teammates. Visualize challenges to see how easily issues can be addressed and create "if...then" scenarios.

Tighten your circle

Once you've assessed options and weighed outcomes, it may be time to take your ideas to another person or team. For many business leaders this is a nonnegotiable step, but group decision-making is tricky and, if not handled properly, can

result in poor decisions. Listening to differing perspectives will be helpful in arriving at a sound decision, but studies show it's wise to avoid overcrowding the decision-making table. In fact, the ideal size for decision making as a group is between seven and nine people. Any more than that, and you risk encountering group think or other phenomena. In our case, we limited most recent decision-making to our tight-knit leadership team, which allowed us to be creative and think of ways to continually innovate in order to support long-term success of the business post-pandemic.

Take a second

Finally, take a beat. After all, everyone has a second to spare and studies show that if you delay pulling the trigger on your decision – even by as little as a half a second – you're able to quickly and effectively assess consequences. Sometimes you may encounter something that takes you back to the drawing board, but either way, this will likely help with confidence and accuracy.

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