

# WHY DO YOU DO WHAT YOU DO?

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**W**hat caused you to choose the breakfast you ate, the clothes you picked out for the day, or the movie you wanted to watch last night? We make decisions and choices all day long - from the procedural to how we choose to react to others. According to researchers at Cornell University, it's estimated that we make approximately 35,000 remotely conscious decisions each day.

When you think about the myriad of decisions we're faced with, we might ask ourselves, "what is it that plays into our decision-making process?" Is it our mind? Our heart? Maybe our "gut"? Many might say it's purely up to the mind – it is the central processor of all our information, right? French philosopher, mathematician, and scientist Rene Descartes, dubbed the father of modern Western philosophy once said, "decisions are a matter of the mind."

As an introduction to one of my classes at Columbia University, I presented this quote from Descartes and asked how many in the room agreed with him. Many raised their hands – they were a class full of engineers after all!

## **WAS DESCARTES RIGHT?**

In response to my class' approval of Descartes' thoughts, I then presented another profound voice – that of Albert Einstein who said, "The intuitive mind is a sacred gift. The rational mind is a faithful servant... we've created a society that honors the servant and has forgotten the gift." It was in that moment I began to

change how these students viewed their thinking and decision-making processes.

Yes, we have miraculous minds, but we have something else – intuition and emotion – that contributes to each of the complex decisions we're faced with each day. Modern-day professor and philosopher, Antonio Damasio wrote an entire book to discredit Descartes' assertion that decisions are simply a matter of the mind. In his book, "Descartes' Error," he writes, "we are not thinking machines that feel...we are feeling machines that think."

## **WE FEEL FIRST AND THINK SECOND**

When you stop to think about it, it's true. People, both in their personal and professional lives make decisions that they feel are the right things to do rather than simply the logical things to do.

Take, for example, Eric Bernstein, the chief operating officer at eFront, a leading provider of software solutions to the financial industry. I once saw Eric give a speech in 2008, right as the financial crisis was gaining traction, during an industry event where a dozen speakers were on the agenda. He did what everyone else didn't – he spoke to the audience's aspirations. He passionately discussed their concerns and helped them to understand how the appropriate risk-management software was not only a defensive tool for recovery but also an offensive weapon for profitability. It was a perfect blend of "I feel your pain" and "we'll get through this together." It was

an emotional call to action, delivered at a time when people seemed to need it the most.

Bernstein's secret? "It's shocking to me how important emotion is in our business," he later told me. "I want the client to feel that I am not just a software vendor; I'm their partner. The majority of my job is to transform something from whatever it is to what I want it to be. Ninety percent of that is the human element." It's Bernstein's ability to communicate emotion that has allowed him to successfully convert countless prospects into clients at eFront. Emotion plays a large part in how we make decisions – and it certainly plays a part in how we respond to the people around us, and how they respond to us.

### **EMOTIONAL WILL ALWAYS PRESENT**

So many of the decisions we make each day are based on how we feel about something. Reflect on the last time you shopped for a car or house: there were likely vehicles or homes that checked "all the boxes" but you just didn't feel it. Likewise, there may have been cars or homes that weren't logically the best choice that spoke to you emotionally – made you feel a certain way and therefore became contenders in the final decision.

The power of emotion is real and will always be a factor. When confronted with a decision, emotions from previous related experiences affix values to the options we are considering. These emotions create preferences, which lead to our decisions.

### **LEVERAGING THE POWER OF EMOTION**

If emotion plays such a large role in what we personally decide to do, it would stand to reason that effective, persuasive, motivating leadership would leverage these feelings. George Campbell, a Scottish philosopher, said it best in his 1776 book *Philosophy of Rhetoric*: "When persuasion is the end, passion also must be engaged."

As a leader, one of your primary objectives is to help guide others to successfully achieve any number of goals and initiatives. Understanding that emotion will be a key factor in how others will ultimately react and respond, you can incorporate the following key principles in effectively communicating with emotion that will not only capture attention, but inspire action:

- **Use emotional language**
- **Develop vivid examples.**
- **Speak with sincerity and conviction.**

Emotion is powerful. When it comes to leadership, it's a power that must be used, but used carefully. First and foremost, pay attention to your heart, mind, and gut when you're making choices, especially those that concern the people around you. When you're more aware of how and why you are doing what you're doing, it'll make it that much easier to understand and relate to others no matter the circumstance. Second, remember your words and manner have the ability to activate emotion – hopefully for the good! - inside the hearts and minds of those around you.



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