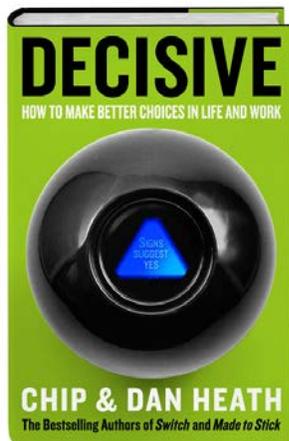


Read the Book!

Decisive: How to Make Better Choices in Life and Work, by Chip and Dan Heath

By Kelly Theofanis, Director of Client Management, EdTec Inc.

While attending the [Education Pioneers](#) 10 Year Celebration this past fall, EdTec Client Manager Kelly Theofanis listened to a speech by Chip Heath, co-author of the *New York Times* bestseller, ***Decisive: How to Make Better Choices in Life and Work***, and was impressed enough with the initial talk to pick up the book. Chip Heath is a professor at Stanford Graduate School of Business and his co-author, Dan Heath, is a senior fellow at Duke University's CASE Center, supporting social entrepreneurs. They are the co-authors of *Switch* and *Made to Stick*, both of which spent months on the *New York Times* and *Business Week* bestseller lists. We think ***Decisive*** provides some excellent take-aways for charter leaders and their organizations as a whole. Read on for Kelly's introduction.



Chip and Dan Heath weigh our innate aptitude for developing opinions and decision making processes against the results of our judgments in their most recent book, ***Decisive: How to Make Better Choices in Life and Work***. At the onset, the authors note, “If you study the kinds of decisions people make and the outcomes of those decisions, you’ll find that humanity does not have a particularly impressive track record.” From corporate mergers and acquisitions

to interpersonal relationships, our decision making approach appears flawed at all levels! In charter schools, the impact of a bad decision (or a good one) is heightened because the stakes are so high for the students and families we serve. No do-overs.

Although it is usually impossible to reverse a bad decision, it can be prevented. The Heath brothers outline four “villains” of decision making that lead us to regrettable results and prescribe processes to mitigate the influence of these traps. The four villains to watch out for are: narrow framing, confirmation bias, short-term emotion, and overconfidence.

- **Narrow Framing** sets the stage for failure when decision makers define choices too narrowly. This happens with the go or no-go types of options; the simple yes or no eliminates the opportunity for creative solutions and exploring third, fourth, or fifth options, especially when this crossroads is reached too early.
- **Confirmation Bias** gets us when we’re not even aware it’s getting us. Confirmation bias is our natural tendency to seek out information that confirms what we already know or want to believe. Think that pros and cons list is really impartial? It isn’t. Our data gathering tends to

test ideas in a one-sided way and leaves out contradictory arguments, especially when we know the boss's opinion in advance.

- **Short-Term Emotion** makes it hard to take the long view. We agonize over the immediate impact of decisions, and it's hard not to when the situation is contentious. Excellent and complete data may be available, but being personally conflicted about the results can drag us toward not making the best choice.
- **Overconfidence** is that little voice, or maybe that really loud voice, that makes us think we know more than we do about what's going to happen. Sometimes we just don't feel uncertain, and that self-assurance will take the lead in predicting outcomes based on only the most readily available information.

Knowing these common pitfalls is the first step; the second step is addressing them with a strategy to counter their effects. The Heath brothers have laid out tactics to overcome these villains in what they call the WRAP process. This methodology is aimed at counteracting the typical biases and process errors in decision making and is summarized below with some common charter-specific examples.

Decision Making Villain	Counter Strategy
Narrow Framing <i>Should we buy iPads for all of our students?</i>	Widen Your Options <i>What is the best way to improve academic outcomes for our students? What technology will best support our learners?</i>
Confirmation Bias <i>I've used that curriculum before, and it is the best option for EL students.</i>	Reality Test Your Assumptions <i>What are the opposing arguments? Can we pilot the curriculum with our students before fully committing?</i>
Short-term Emotion <i>Should we add new grade levels to our charter?</i>	Attain Distance Before Deciding <i>Consider how you will feel 10 minutes after the decision, 10 months after the decision, and then 10 years after the decision.</i>
Overconfidence <i>It's impossible our charter will not be renewed.</i>	Prepare to Be Wrong

We face multiple decision points every day, most of which won't have a major impact on the rest of our lives; but, when facing important choices in life or work, this framework focuses on the processes that will help drive us toward the best outcomes. While the results of bad decision-making can be disastrous, the outlook should be positive: with the discipline to commit to a deliberate decision making process, we're all capable of yielding great results. In education, decisions large and small can have

lasting influence on our communities, so it's especially important to pay close attention to our own biases and thinking processes to build a consensus based on best practices. ***Decisive: How to Make Better Choices in Life and Work*** provides some powerful tools to help us do so. 