

So, by definition, each of us takes important actions as a leader, actions with real ramifications—in our roles with our family...with our church...with our workplace. The question is, are those ultimately wise actions that bear good fruit? Well, not necessarily *every* time bearing good fruit, but consistently so?

So, what's a proven path to great decisions by leaders? Well, many would say that's not easily ascertained. But I would say *this* in response to *that*: if we really don't know *how* or *why* we're making good decisions, that's a really big problem. Why? First, we don't have readily-identified processes for gaining wisdom, and, second, when we do happen to be successful, we're not likely to easily replicate our success.

I do think there is a broad cycle of decision-making that is universal and foundational. The reality is, you must have wisdom to make good decisions...wisdom is simply the main, core requirement for fruitful decision-making. But then, just where do you actually get wisdom? Well, wisdom comes from strong research. So, the cycle is this, broadly speaking, couched in Old Testament language: great research begets wisdom which in turn begets effective action. Again, that's...research begets wisdom begets action.

Now, I know you've always heard how to shoot a gun: ready, aim, fire. Right? Ready, aim, fire. And you surely know the old joke that jumbles those three up to this: ready, fire, aim. Of course, that really is pretty funny and is exactly how the shooter—or a leader—can miss the desired target. But how about *this* approach instead? ...Fire. Yes, I just said only one word: "Fire."

Now, it's easy to assume that that approach is surely the worst case of all—just firing away without either getting appropriately ready or really aiming. But, at the end of an analysis of a leader just firing away, pretty much everyone can tell there was no foundational research or wisely intentional aiming. The good news is that there can actually be readily-identified accountability for that type of leader.

But you see, there actually is a worse case than the shoot-from-the-hip leader who just fires away—and this worst case is the downfall of many a leader and many an enterprise. Worse, you say? How could it be worse than the leader just being a slap-happy gunslinger, winging important decisions?

Well, here's the deal. The worst case is when the decision-maker believes or actually pretends that good research and wisdom is actually happening—when it isn't. And that very thing happens all the time in virtually every enterprise, at least at some level of decision-making. So, let's remind ourselves: to have effective action, you must have strong wisdom that is born from and supported by solid research.

So, let's do a simple diagnosis right off the bat. First and foremost, good wisdom first requires that you actually know what good research looks like, and—now, this is very important—you must know what that good research looks like in its totality. So, just where do you go for research?

Well, here's the first gigantic key to success in all areas of decision-making: you must work to be well-equipped *personally* for judging the quality of research for your enterprise's decision-making. Well, duh, you say. That's stating the obvious. Yes, it is. But the sad fact is, many, many managers and executives at important levels of all types of enterprises do not make decisions well and, worse, have no plans to get better at decision-making. Even worse than *that*, their enterprises have either no awareness or no desire to make their team better in this area. That's because the average enterprise is, well, just *average*!

A bell curve reveals this reality. If you don't know what a bell curve is, it's a picture depicting what's called a "normal distribution," and you need to go research that! Heh! Just do a quick search online and you'll understand the gist of a bell curve pretty quickly. But here's a summary conclusion: most enterprises are simply "average," yes, simply average—*by definition*! There are always a few great enterprises at the right end of the curve and a few abysmal enterprises at the left end of the curve, but the vast majority of activity

is perched somewhere in the middle. So, it's definitionally true, yes *definitionally* true, that the typical person is working with average leaders in an average enterprise. And, in the long-term, that's poison!

Why? Because average leaders in average enterprises tend to embrace average research that leads to average wisdom causing average actions—yes, average actions defeated very easily by great competitors.

Here's my prayer for you: may you never willingly settle for average, not even once! But even when working in a strong enterprise, you are going to be engaged with at least *some* average people and even *some* average leaders. But *you* must work to show yourself approved by God—He calls you to greatness! That means you have to have a strong plan, and that plan should be to *first pursue great research!*

So, how do we as individual leaders just begin to acquire and build great research foundations—rock-solid foundations that will serve as bulwarks for wisdom that can and should foster strong, successful actions?

First, *fear God and keep His commandments*. That's from Ecclesiastes 12:13. Well, duh! Companies come and companies go. Families come and families go. Nations come and nations go. But God and His Word and His Kingdom stand forever! But don't just narrow your focus on "the Word" to a few of His commandments. God's Kingdom is the most astutely conceived and executed organization ever—and that truth bring us to this...

Second, *make sure you study the entire Bible for all its worth, both now and ongoing*. You see, God has documented the fullness of His handiwork for all of us to see, *when we have decided to have eyes to see*: the magnificence of His glory...creating humanity while still allowing for failure, grace, and redemption... long-suffering responses for the greatest personal and organizational outcomes...manifesting the unshakeable nature of His Kingdom for believers to enjoy now and forevermore. Every enterprise—every business, every nonprofit, every government, every church—can and should learn from studying the whole Bible. That goes beyond mundane, conventional confinements of "theology" into the whole of life.

Third, *go learn from the true experts in all your fields of endeavor*—and your fields of endeavor likely range from your family, to your work life, to your spiritual life. Study the truly best practitioners, not just armchair theorists. Remember, in any given field of endeavor, even the experts sit somewhere on a bell curve—are the "experts" you are relying on sitting solidly in the *average* section of the bell curve?

Here's the good news: it used to be that key knowledge was hidden—often deliberately so—by people in power, like kings, popes, doctors and professors. But now, with the ever-exploding increase of knowledge, technology, and internet access, a discerning person can very often get to key truths and understandings at a very low cost. Some bad news? Often, the crowd, even the leading crowd of experts, is wrong, outdated, or biased. But more good news? The very same! Often, the crowd, even the leading crowd of experts, is wrong, outdated, or biased. That gives you, the discerning researcher, a cutting-edge lead.

Fourth, *hold on to your foundational knowledge and research with just the right amount of tension*: holding strongly on what you truly know to be true while holding loosely on what may be disputed or unsettled or transitory or just plain wrong. This is especially important in an era with so-called "experts" and "knowledge" being highly politicized and with viewpoints masquerading as "knowledge" funded by the highest bidders.

Fifth, *ask God for wisdom*. That's in James 1:5. God will indeed give you wisdom. So, why did I say this last? Because the fullness of wisdom requires all five facets; if you're not well-grounded in the first four tasks, then asking God for wisdom without a previously-built foundation of research is immature folly.

So, there we have it: our opening task is real research built on solid methods and sources. Only now, we can legitimately start on our important journey of research-wisdom-action. *First, pursue solid research!*

## *A&A: Application & Action*

1. Where would you generally place your workplace on a basic poor-average-great scale? Your church? Describe how you specifically measure such assessments—what are your key metrics?
2. Look at the five dimensions identified for foundational research. Which is the least deployed by you? What's in second place as least-deployed? Why? Should you change, or not?
3. Do you believe that the hierarchy of these five is accurate—for example, fearing God and keeping His commandments is properly first and asking God for wisdom is properly last? If so, why? If not, how should these five be ordered?