Better Decisions in Three Steps

## Using a triage process for more efficient problem-solving

BY SHIELA MIE LEGASPI

Managers face any number of challenges that require immediate attention and action, so the ability to make decisions and solve problems quickly can be critically important. One tool that can be of help is the triage decision-making process. Triage decision-making is used in emergency medical situations to determine the treatment required for patients, who are prioritized based on the severity of their condition and the likelihood of recovery, as well as what additional measures will need to be taken for them to fully recover.

This same approach can be applied to business management. Managers can use this to prioritize issues and allocate resources to address the most pressing problems. More importantly, it puts a process in place: each person knows how they fit into the triage decision-making process and can tap in if needed. Without triage and defined roles, the issue can escalate rapidly. Here is how to put it into practice.

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1 Identify the issue.

The first step is to identify the issue or problem. To determine the scope and impact of the problem, gather all relevant information and data. At this stage, involving stakeholders—including employees and customers—will help you understand the full scope of the issue. Adopting a big-picture mindset to better understand the issue helps you effectively strategize and appropriately allocate people and resources toward the desired outcome.
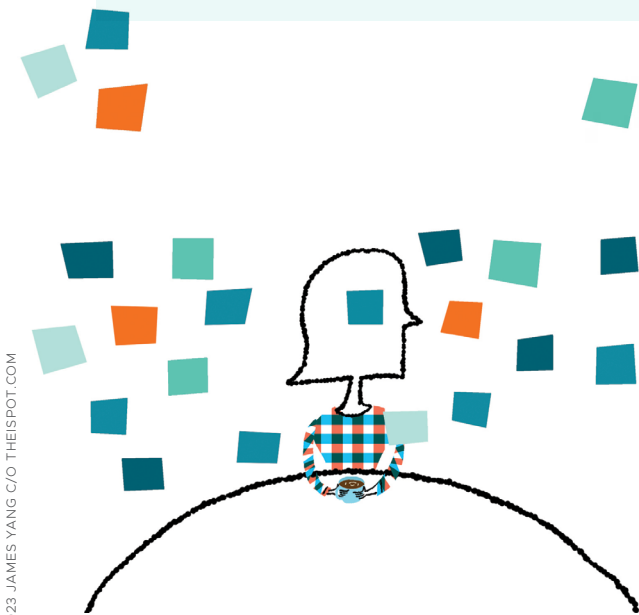
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Prioritize the urgency of the issue.

Based on its urgency and importance, prioritize the problem into three levels: high, medium, or low. High-priority issues are critical and require immediate attention, while medium-priority issues can wait a little longer before action is needed. Low-priority issues are not time-specific and don't require immediate attention. Some managers like to color-code their problems like nurses do in the hospital emergency room. Color-coding allows you to categorize each type of problem and reference it easily if it comes up again.

After prioritizing the situation, immediately allocate resources to address the high-priority problems—assigning personnel, providing funding, or delegating responsibilities. This ensures that your teams focus their efforts where they are most needed.

3

Monitor progress.

The final step in the triage decision-making process is to monitor progress and adjust the plan as needed. As with any decision-making process, unforeseen obstacles or challenges that may arise will need to be accounted for. Continually monitor progress and adapt the strategy to resolve the issue as effectively and efficiently as possible. Also record the entire process, which helps create a system to better tackle other problems that arise in the future.

> Using the triage decision-making process allows for quick and efficient problem-solving, helps reduce stress, increases productivity, and significantly improves team communication and collaboration.

Benefits

This general triage process emulates the one used by emergency nurses but setting up a three-point decision-making process for each department can work just as efficiently.

For example, start by determining if you or your team has set the right expectations, and if the "client" understood them (or vice versa). Have an evaluation call or meeting to verify that the priorities, tasks, and job descriptions were clear, and address the mismatch or misunderstanding, perhaps by providing more or better training.

Using the triage decision-making process allows for quick and efficient problem-solving, helps reduce stress, increases productivity, and significantly improves team communication and collaboration. You might fail, and possibly many times, but as they say, hard times create strong people. Failure, while disappointing, can lead to further learning opportunities, and implementing clear processes helps minimize the severity of most problems. 🔲

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