

Well, hey leaders. Welcome to this month's Leader's Circle. We're doing something a little bit different this month. We're giving you an excerpt, you and your team, an excerpt of a course I've done that's a companion product to my brand new book called At Your Best. And we wanted to give you a sample of some of the material that we covered. So in this session, I'm going to be sharing something that didn't make it into the book. When you write a book, you have all kinds of ideas that kind of don't make it and so this is some bonus material. We're really grateful that you're part of Leader's Circle. And it gets down to the challenge of how do you make decisions? Because if you think about it, as a leader, as I'll share in this month's teaching, what you do is make decisions all day long.

I'm going to share with you a story from a time in my leadership, where when I was a church leader, leading a church full-time, I was trying to get us past a thousand in attendance. And we had a whole lot of new people and I couldn't figure out why were we stuck at 800, 900? We just couldn't break a thousand in attendance. And then I realized, believe it or not of all the things, one of the things that was holding us back was decision-making. Too many decisions were crossing my desk. And I want you to think about your own leadership in this month's training and think about like how many decisions really belong on my desk. And then when you process this with your leadership executive team or your staff, ask them the same question. Like how many decisions are crossing your desk and how many questions need to cross your desk?

Because if you think about how organizations grow in scale, they grow in scale when you really release decision-making to everybody in the organization. Think about Richard Branson who heads up Virgin, right? The whole Virgin empire. How many decisions do you think he's making day to day about space travel? What meals are going to be served in business class on Virgin airlines? What music Virgin... Like he's not picking new artists for Virgin music. No, he's on Necker Island, like and he's delegated all that and that's why he can run hundreds of companies in the Virgin family. And so I realized if I'm going to be a better leader, I've got to release decision-making. And so I hope this session will help you and your team. You may want to do a review of your own decision-making and then sit down with your leadership or executive team and review theirs.

And of course, you want to share this with your entire team. And even think about the application of this and some of your volunteers. Because sometimes staff get bottlenecked, even at a lower level, if you have a large staff because they're not releasing enough to volunteers. So hopefully, this will help you with decision-making, bottleneck decision-making. But also we're going to talk about decision fatigue and given the last 18 months in leadership, I think a lot of us are tired too. Hope you enjoy this unit, and it helps you in this month's Leader's Circle. It's part of the bonus material that we produced for you as a part of the release of At Your Best. So you won't find this in the book. This is just for you in Leader's Circle and in the At Your Best course.

Welcome to Leader's Circle. In this month's training, I want to share with you an excerpt from my brand new course called At Your Best. It's all about how to get time, energy, and priorities working in your favor. And in today's teaching, we'll look at making better decisions. If you think about how leadership works so much of it rests on decision-making. You go to work, what do you have to do? Make decisions all day, but life is like that as well. It's a thousand decisions. What are we going to do Friday night? What should we have for dinner? Are we going to buy the kids new clothes or not? And what do we do about this, right? It's decisions all day long. And for the most part, we're not very good at it. So in this session, I'm going to look at two key challenges everyone has to overcome to make better decisions. First, decision fatigue and second, being the decision bottleneck. According to a study by Israeli and American researchers and published in the National Academy of Sciences, even judicial figures get tired and their fatigue seems to impact their decision-making.

So here's a case study. Three men doing time in Israeli prisons appeared before a parole board consisting of a judge, a criminologist and a social worker. Kind of sounds like a joke, but it's not, it's a real case study. So the three prisoners had all completed at least two thirds of their sentences, but the parole board only granted freedom to one of them. Guess which one? Case number one heard at 8:50 AM, an Arab Israeli serving a 30 month sentence for fraud. Case number two, heard at 3:10 PM, a Jewish Israeli serving a 16 month sentence for assault and case number three, heard at 4:25 in the afternoon, an Arab Israeli serving a 30 month sentence for fraud. So they analyzed hundreds of cases. This is just a sample. And the pattern is this. It wasn't related to the men's ethnic backgrounds, their crimes, or their sentences.

It was all about time of day that the decision was made. They analyze more than 1100 decisions over the course of the year. And here's what they found. Judges who would hear the prisoner's appeal and then get advice from other members of the board approved parole in about a third of the cases, but the probability of being paroled fluctuated wildly throughout the day. Prisoners who appeared early in the morning, received parole about 70% of the time, while those who appeared late in the day were paroled less than 10% of the time. The odds favored the prisoners who appeared at 8:50 AM. Isn't that strange? And he did in fact receive parole. But the other, even though the Arab Israeli prisoner was serving the same sentence for the same crime, fraud, the odds were against him when he appeared on a different day at 4:25 in the afternoon. He was denied parole as was the Jewish Israeli prisoner at 3:10 PM, whose sentence was shorter than that of the man who was released.

They were just asking for parole at the wrong time of day. Daniel Pink found the same thing happened with surgeons in hospitals. Anesthesiologists, who is the doctor who puts you under for surgery, have an adverse event about 1% of the time at 9:00 AM, but at 4:00 PM, the rate rises to 4.2%. You're over four times more likely to have a problem in the afternoon on a procedure than if they work on you in the morning. The culprit, researchers are pointing to the physician circadian rhythms that make focusing harder in the afternoon. Similarly, studies of colonoscopy accuracy. Colonoscopies were once artfully described to me by a friend as the art of having a garden hose stuck up your butt, showed that doctors detect polyps, which are the growths that can indicate cancer at a lower rate as the day progresses. Each hour produces a 5% reduction in detection.

And if you have cancer, you want them to be able to detect it. So if this impacts highly trained medical doctors and judicial figures. I promise you, decision fatigue impacts you and me. So leveraging your green zone to do your most important thinking is critical and avoid making decisions in your red zone because you're just not going to be as good. A simple way to think about it is this. Don't let fatigue make your decisions for you. I can understand that you get tired. Sometimes, you have a complete season of fatigue, but the one thing you should avoid is having your exhaustion and your fatigue make your decisions for you. Take care of yourself and let the mission determine your decisions, not your fatigue. Nothing good happens when you're tired. So the question then becomes, well, how do you avoid decision fatigue? See awareness is one thing, but predeciding certain decisions and automating others really helps.

So in addition to using your green zone to make your key decisions, to further avoid decision fatigue, try a few simple practices that a few famous leaders have tried. For example, you may have noticed that people like Mark Zuckerberg and Steve Jobs wore the same thing, everyday, gray t-shirt and jeans, or a black mock turtleneck and jeans, respectively. Albert Einstein bought several versions of the same tweed suit, wore it every single day. Now that's not just a fashion statement. Actually, it's more about mental energy and decision fatigue. Einstein reportedly said his decision to dress the same way every day was so he didn't need to think about what he was going to wear. You would think Einstein of all people

would have the brainpower to spare, but he realized that even his mental energy gets spent like money gets spent, it eventually runs out. And he didn't think clothes were a great focal point for his thinking.

I agree. Conserve your mental energy as though it were a finite resource because science is showing it is. Now, I haven't quite committed to the same clothes day, wearing the same day. But on big days, like when I'm filming a course or having a key meeting, I will actually just select my clothes the night before. I'm shocked by the difference it makes because I'm no longer rummaging through my closet at 6:30 in the morning, thinking thoughts like, hey, did I wear that last week? Or have I worn that before when I was shooting this video? Do these even match? Like I'm kind of colorblind, to be honest with you and fashion challenged. So I have to find my wife or my team, or does this still fit? Is this too tight? Is this too loose? All of those questions get answered the night before.

So what am I focusing on instead the day of a big day, the message, the delivery, the people, and I even have more time to prepare. So try it, on a big day, pick your clothes out the night before. Now that's just clothes but you can also automate decisions by doing the same thing every day. Try this, like eat the same thing for breakfast or lunch every day. I do that often. It's a great way to conserve energy. You make healthy choices and then you automate your decision-making. Don't have to think about it. What are we going to eat? Don't worry about it, you already know. Automating your exercise routine can help free up brain power too. I'm not training for the Olympics, but I love to cycle. And as boring as it is, I often pick the same one hour loop for my rides.

Why? Because I don't have to think about it. I just have my kit ready, I go, I don't have to think about where I'm going. And then I can just relax and it doesn't use up valuable energy I could spend thinking about other things, just like you can move to categorical decision-making about things you don't do. We talked about that before, breakfast meetings, sales events. Categorical decisions about what you can do will help. So here's an example, early in the life of our company, we decided we weren't going to put our courses like this one on sale. And that might sound like a radical idea but for us it made sense. We didn't want to compete on price. We wanted to compete on value. And value to me is the gap between what you paid for something and the benefit it gave you. So we hope that whatever you paid for this course, that you got a lot of value out of it.

And you would say, "Wow, the time I got back, the difference it made exceeded the price point." So what we decided to do is courses don't go on sale. So that way, whenever you buy it, even if the price goes up in the future, you've got it at the best available price. Because we've all had the experience of buying a shirt and let's say it costs \$50 and two months later, you see it on sale for 20 bucks. And you're like, well, I paid 50 bucks for something that obviously is only worth 20. So we didn't want to cheat people by saying, "Oh, we pretended for you it was worth this but for these people it's worth that." So we just said, no, it doesn't go on sale. And we want everybody to feel like they got more value from the course than what they paid for.

We also added a 30 day money back guarantee to everything we sell. So you can try it for 30 days. If it doesn't work, give you your money back. No questions asked. And what we found is that that strategy for online courses, the refund rate can be as high as 10 to 30%. Ours is one percent or lower. And we just want to deliver on value. So again, when people say, "Will this ever go on sale? Are we going to put this on sale?" Now we know no, when you bought this course that is the lowest the price will ever be. And, if you buy it in the future it could be the same or it will be higher, but you're never going to find it for less and that guarantees you value. In a similar way, you can automate your personal finances by putting a percentage of every paycheck into savings every month.

Or you can do automatic check-ins with your best friends, coffee with Josh every Friday afternoon at 1:00. And you can make so many other decisions that just automate what's important. So following these strategies will really help with decision fatigue. You're human, I'm human and cooperating with

our humanity definitely helps. You still have to make some decisions, but getting rid of some of the ones you don't need to make can really assist you. So let's turn to a whole other area of decision-making that impacts our decision-making at work. And I call that becoming the decision bottleneck. So our story was that when I was leading a church full-time and I did that for two decades, we had some rapid growth. But we got stuck at the thousand attendance mark. Between 800 and 1000, it took a couple of years for us to break through that ceiling.

And it wasn't like we weren't attracting new people. We're bringing in new people all the time. The challenge was I became the bottleneck. Because I started with just a handful of people and it was me solo so I kind of made all the decisions along with some advisors. But then we added staff and then more staff and then we had a leadership team and an executive team. And eventually, there were too many decisions that were coming through me. And I realized, okay, this is the bottleneck. Like if you're the leader, you're the lid. I was the leader, I was the lid and staff were always coming to me. And so we'd have this thing called leadership team because I like to include other people in decision-making and we would have it every Tuesday at 1:00 at the time. And sometimes because of the size and the growth, it would be a long agenda.

And maybe we didn't get through that whole agenda or maybe the next week I was away or somebody was sick. And then we didn't quite get that well because we want to talk about it when Jeff's around or Dan's around. So we'd wait or wait until Nadine's back then we make the decision. And the decisions were just piling up. So I realized I'm the cap, I'm the cap on all this. I'm the problem. So here's the decision we made. We decided to make decision-making as clear and simple as possible. So I want to walk you through this. This is what I told my team. I called everybody together and I said, "Here's our new rule. If you're the leader, you're the decision maker. You're free to consult with whoever you want. You can talk to your staff, to volunteers, your core team, whoever you want. You do not need permission from me. You don't need permission from anyone. You're the leader. Lead."

And organizations that make decisions in teams often face delays, frustrations, or if everything has to go through the CEO or the lead pastor, you can suffer from a lack of clarity and great frustration. Think about how committee systems just grind everything to a halt. Now, there are exceptions to being the sole decision maker for a few things. If, I told my staff, this decision requires spending that moves your total budget number higher than the budgeted number for your year, you need to get approval. So let's say you had \$10,000 in your department. For me, I don't care how you spend that \$10,000. You think you want to spend it all on food, spend it on food. If you want to spend it on curriculum, spend it on curriculum. Just run a great ministry, run a great program.

And as long as you do that, you don't need permission. If you're going to spend \$11,000, well, that's more than was budgeted. Now you need to have a conversation, but that doesn't happen very often. So number one was, if you're spending exceeds the budget, you need approval. Second was if your decision impacts the mission, vision, or strategy, or even the values of our organization, then you should talk about it with me or the team or third, if your decision impacts other areas. So let's say you're making a decision on the music, but it's going to have some impact on the student ministry. Well, then you got to at least talk to the other members of the team. But if it's within your budget, if it's consistent with our mission, vision, strategy, and values, if it doesn't impact others, then go ahead. You're the leader. You're the decision.

So when you make the decision, you also become accountable and responsible for the results. And you know what we discovered, as soon as we made that shift, we broke the 1000 attendance barrier. We resumed our growth. And what I realized is that leaders who empower their teams have better teams. Now, guess what that also did? Made my life easier, made everybody's life easier and got us more on mission than ever before. So everybody kind of wins in that scenario. Now, one objection you might

have to push down decision-making is whether quality will suffer. After all you're saying to yourself, Carey, what if they can't do it as well as I do? What if I'm worried that they're going to take us off mission? Well, initially you're right. Maybe you could do it better and the quality might suffer for a little bit, but if you really want to grow, you've got to let go.

And eventually, what'll happen is that people will get better at what you release them to do than even you could do it. You'll end up raising up better communicators, better writers, better thinkers, better whatever you're doing. And a good rule of thumb is if they can do it 80% as well as you, let them do it. Because eventually, they'll get as good as you or better. Or even if they don't quite measure up to you, you are still going to be able to grow your organization faster. Danielle Strickland is a leader who does a lot of advocacy and great development work around the world. I remember talking to her and I was joking with her because I said, "Hey, Danielle, every time I talk to you, you've started this new not-for-profit." That's like freeing people in human trafficking or building houses for the homeless. And I said, "How do you start so many things and lead them all? Like, how do you raise up that many leaders?"

And she just at me and she goes, "Easy, leave." She says, "It's amazing when you start something, you step out of the way leaders step up." And that leads us back to this principle. If you want to grow, you've got to let go. So let your leaders make decisions. And then if they're the leader, they're responsible. And when you make decisions, don't let your fatigue make your decisions for you. When you do that, combined with automating your decision-making, you're going to make your best decisions in your green zone. And all of this will get you on your way to making better decisions and freeing up more hours in your week. And when that happens, you get closer still to redeeming hours and living in a way today that will help you thrive tomorrow. So Leader's Circle members, that's one sample from the At Your Best course. We are going to give you another preview of some of the content, there's 14 sessions, next month. So watch for that. I really hope this helped.