7 Steps to Think Smarter and Make Better Decisions

Your brain loves shortcuts. That's fine for everyday stuff, but for big decisions—the kind that shape your team, your goals, or your future—you need to slow down. Here's an easy-to-follow process to help you think critically, inspired by Daniel Kahneman's insights.

Step 1: Stop and Think

Don't rush into decisions.
Before reacting, ask yourself:

- Am I making this decision on autopilot?
- Is this a complex or important issue?

When something really matters, take a moment to pause. Snap decisions can lead to mistakes.

Step 2: Define the Real Problem

What are you trying to solve?
Often, we jump into fixing things without fully understanding the issue. Instead:

- Write down the problem in one clear sentence.
- Ask: *Is this the root problem or just a symptom?*

The better you understand the problem, the better your solution will be.

Step 3: Gather the Facts

Get the full story before deciding.
Don't rely on gut feelings alone. Find solid information to base your decision on:

- What evidence do I have?
- Is my information reliable?

Example: If guests complain about delays, check the schedules and talk to staff before deciding it's a staffing problem.

Step 4: Challenge Your First Idea

Don't assume your first thought is right.
Your brain wants the easiest answer, but that doesn't mean it's the best. To avoid falling into this trap:

- Ask: *What am I missing?*
- Look at the problem from someone else's perspective.
- Play devil's advocate: argue against your own idea to see if it holds up.

Step 5: Look at Your Options

Think through your choices.
List your possible solutions and consider:

- What's the best-case scenario?
- What's the worst-case scenario?
- Which option has the biggest long-term benefit?

This step helps you avoid jumping to quick fixes that don't solve the real problem.

Step 6: Make a Decision

Decide and commit.
You've done the work—now it's time to act. Don't let overthinking or fear of being wrong hold you back.

Ask yourself:

- Does this solve the root problem?
- Is this decision based on facts, not assumptions?

Step 7: Reflect and Learn

Afterward, take time to think about how it went.
Every decision is a chance to learn. Ask yourself:

- Did it work? Why or why not?
- What could I do better next time?

By reflecting, you'll make smarter decisions in the future.

Example: Let's Break This Down

Scenario:
Your dive instructor is getting complaints from guests. What should you do?

- **Step 1:** Stop and think. Don't immediately blame them. Pause to figure out what's going on.
- **Step 2:** Define the problem. Is it their behavior, skills, or a mismatch with their role?
- **Step 3:** Gather facts. Look at guest feedback, ask the instructor for their perspective, and review their performance.
- **Step 4:** Challenge assumptions. Are you overreacting based on recent complaints?
- **Step 5:** Look at options. Retrain them? Move them to a different role? Let them go?

- **Step 6:** Make a decision. Choose the option that fits your goals and values.
- **Step 7:** Reflect. Did the decision improve things? If not, what could you have done differently?

The Bottom Line

Thinking critically doesn't mean overthinking—it means slowing down, looking at the facts, and making thoughtful decisions. It's not about being perfect. It's about being intentional.

Start small. Use these steps the next time you face a tough decision, and watch how much clearer your thinking becomes.