

# JUDGMENT

## How Winning Leaders Make Great Calls

**NOEL TICHY and WARREN BENNIS**

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**MAIN IDEA**

The essence of great leadership is to make sound judgment calls. Effective leaders take the correct actions even in the face of ambiguity, uncertainty, conflicting demands and severe time pressure. Leaders add value to their organizations by exercising sound judgement, by making smart calls and by then following through and ensuring everything is well executed.

So why do some leaders make consistently better judgment calls than others? It is generally because of the fact great leaders have a stronger and more robust framework in place before the decision gets made. Great leaders view making good judgment calls as a process rather than a one-off event. Making sound judgement calls usually unfolds in three dimensions:

- *Time* – what happens before a judgment call is made and then afterwards in order to generate the desired results.
- *Domain* – the areas which make the most difference to the survival and well-being of any organization, which are usually people, strategy and handling crises.
- *Constituencies* – the sources of information which leaders harness to make judgment calls and then execute what is required to make successful calls.

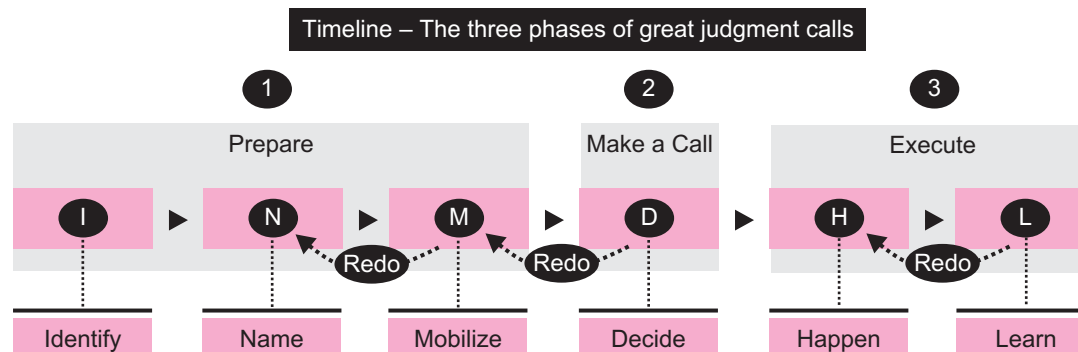
*“The thing that really matters is not how many calls a leader gets right, or even what percentage of calls a leader gets right. Rather, it is how many of the important ones he or she gets right. Good leaders not only make better calls, but they are able to discern the really important ones and get a higher percentage of them right. They are better at a whole process that runs from seeing the need for a call, to framing issues, to figuring out what is critical, to mobilizing and energizing the troops. Good leaders are able to triage their time and energy, and focus on the consequential. All too many leaders let Rome burn while attending to the trivial. With good judgment, little else matters. Without it, nothing else matters. Good judgment is the essence of good leadership.”*

– Noel Tichy and Warren Bennis

**Sound judgment calls generally encompass three distinct dimensions:**

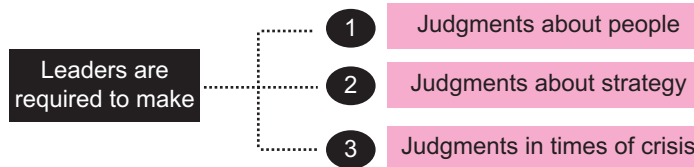
**Dimension #1 – Time . . . . . Pages 2 - 3**

The judgment calls leaders are required to make can never really be viewed as standalone or single-point-in-time events. Instead, the making of a call generally comes in the middle of a process which starts with preparation and finishes with following through on execution. All three of these phases are important in the exercise of good judgment.



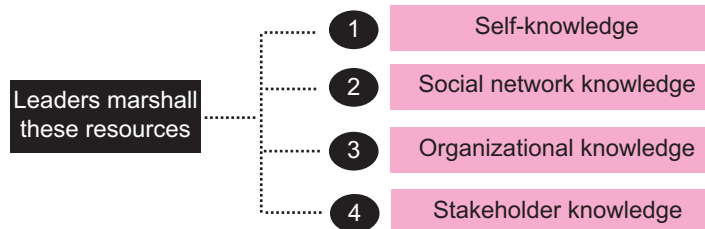
**Dimension #2 – Domain . . . . . Pages 4 - 6**

The three critical domains in which leaders tend to make their most important and far-reaching judgment calls are:



**Dimension #3 – Resources and constituencies . . . . . Pages 7 - 8**

The quality of any leader’s judgments depend to a large degree on his or her ability to marshall resources and interact with others. Great leaders use four types of knowledge to make the best judgment calls they can:



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