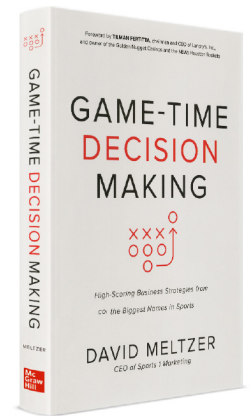


Game-Time Decision Making

High-Scoring Business Strategies from the Biggest Names in Sports

by **David Meltzer**



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THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

When the pressure is on, great coaches remain laser-focused, confident, and fully in charge of their roster. They're the same way when it comes to developing strategies and game plans to succeed. They always win because they have a superior decision-making process.

Game-Time Decision Making provides everything you need to improve your decision-making game and build a championship-level business. It takes you step by step through the process of putting together an all-pro team with diverse skillsets, building a positive mindset that will overwhelm the competition, developing a keen awareness of “the playing field,” creating both offensive and defensive strategies for branding and marketing, and more.

Game-Time Decision Making is a proven playbook for positioning yourself for success. From creating and utilizing the best tactics and strategies to leading your company through times of change, this is your playbook for total business success.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- Why attracting the right people to your team depends on building yourself.
- The importance of humility for making coaching a key part of the organization.
- To stay in the learning zone.
- Offensive and defensive strategies for branding, marketing, and communication.

Introduction

In business, as in sports, it often comes down to split-second decision making “on the field,” when the game is on the line, when the pressure is on, and your whole team is counting on you. Sports and business are both arenas where understanding yourself is just as important as understanding your opponent, where to be a winner and to create a dynasty of achievement and success, you need to make consistent decisions in an efficient, effective, and statistically successful manner.

Consistency, whether in life, on the field, or in the boardroom, comes from a combination of factors. The first of these is your awareness, which means having a clear understanding of the given situation, picturing desired outcomes, and acting accordingly. Decisions are also influenced by your conviction in achieving your goals and by the core values you hold, which inspire you to keep pushing through any adversity and curbing any inclinations to quit.

You must also be able to access the information you need rapidly, accurately, and with confidence, while also detaching your emotions from the desired outcome. The final component of consistent decision making comes from approaching each new game-time decision with a mindset of desire that strives for greatness, a spirit of excellence, along with the equally important aspect of forgiveness. You must understand that not every decision you make will be correct, and that’s okay. There is never an acceptable excuse to stop making those calls, however.

Let’s now learn how to build your mindset, to become the type of leader and coach that you want to be: a person who will put his or her team in a position to excel no matter what game you’re playing.

Putting Together Your Roster by Building Yourself

Every great coach needs a team to lead. How should you approach building yours? The best leaders have a firm grasp on the values that they believe in, and those values are what resonate most when building relationships, both in business and in life. As the head of an organization, you must also learn to listen to the input of others, filter advice in order to gain a better awareness of your surroundings, and leverage that heightened awareness to improve your decision making.

Attracting the Right People to Our Team

To recruit the best players to our roster, it is essential that

we develop and maintain meaningful relationships with the people surrounding us. But, ironically, the most important relationship we must develop and maintain to build our roster is with ourselves. We must not only think, say, and do the right things to attract the right people. We must also believe the right things and even carry the right energy.

This can happen only if we create the right personal and team values: gratitude, empathy, accountability, and effective communication. After we learn to love ourselves, the people we surround ourselves with will become relative to our integrity, happiness, and energy—and so our bonds will strengthen.

Our dream team includes family, friends, associates, and mentors. And the key to developing and maintaining the right relationships with these people is understanding relativity. Relativity means that everything and everyone on earth are all on the same team, no matter what. This understanding of relativity is meant to give you a perspective that is based on gratitude and empathy, which, in turn, makes everything relative to you. If you’re always gracious, then everything is relatively good all the time.

Legendary basketball coach John Wooden included a great aphorism in his 1973 book, *They Call Me Coach*: “Things turn out best for people who make the best of the way things turn out.” Without the relativity that gratitude provides, we feel cheated, and we see only voids, obstacles, and shortages. With gratitude comes togetherness and a sense of team.

When your values have positioned you to be a leader of others, you must place a focus on the character of the individuals that you bring onto your team and consider whether their values and goals are aligned with yours.

Moreover, in business relationships, be prepared because everyone will test you, especially your team members. The best coaches don’t demand respect from their team only at those times when they walk into the locker room. Instead, they have an expectation that their roster will live with a spirit of excellence. That expectation is something you need to drill into your squad, giving them the inspiration to push through the difficult times instead of simply looking for the easy way out. Share true stories, whether personal or observed, about former co-workers or employees who showed perseverance, or highlight current team members who display that attitude. As Lakers legend Jerry West said, “You can’t get much done in life if you only work on the days when you feel good.” To keep your team aligned with organizational goals, give them positive reinforcement, tools, or strategies that are rooted in your core values.

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Offensive/Defensive Mindset

Once you have surrounded yourself with the right team, you must create a game plan with the right mindset. Having a negative mindset is one of the biggest mistakes that anyone can make, so you need to arm yourself to defend against any negativity that comes your way. Make sure your defense is ready for any offense.

How do you accomplish this? You must first understand how your mind works—consciously, subconsciously, and unconsciously. Just like the three phases of football (offense, defense, and special teams), you need to be successful in all three areas in order to consistently win.

Our *conscious* mind evaluates what people think, what people say, and what people do. The *subconscious* mind deals with the countless things that we believe. Belief becomes aligned with the entire roster of our thoughts, both conscious and subconscious. The reason for this is that what we believe vibrates faster than our conscious thought.

The totality of our personal values, experiential values, giving values, and receiving values are input into our subconscious and our unconscious. It is our *unconscious* competency, the energy that we carry, that attracts to us what we have in our life. Our unconscious is what guides our in-the-moment decision making, and this is why it is necessary to understand how information, good and bad, manifests itself in the results of those split-second choices.

Unconscious Competency

Have you ever heard of a basketball player who is on a hot shooting streak referred to as being “unconscious”? There is a reason for that. When we do something over and over, the action gets ingrained in our cellular memory, which is something you can take advantage of so that you can be more efficient, effective, and statistically successful. This rapid thinking (and execution) is why you must program your mind the way athletes program their muscles.

A great way to avoid negative thinking and instill subconscious and unconscious confidence is through positive rep-

etition. For athletes, having these positive mantras can help affirm their confidence in their abilities, preparing their mind to work in unison with their body.

One of the best examples of this is a set of mantras called “The Athlete’s Litany.” This set of phrases is meant to be repeated every day, until they are a subconscious belief and eventually an unconscious competency. These can be easily adapted and incorporated into the routine of any leader, imbuing confidence in the approach he or she is taking to solving a problem.

Creating a Leader’s Litany of your own can help give you more resolve in your actions, leading to better performance and a mindset capable of handling any challenging decision that may come your way. For example,

- I have passion for my job.
- I am committed to the enjoyment of the pursuit of my potential.
- I will provide as much value as I can and ask big in return.
- I will give 100 percent of my focus and intention to excelling in my role at work and helping others to do the same.
- If I focus on progress and not perfection, I will succeed.
- I will think and talk positively.
- I will get out of my comfort zone and into the learning zone.
- I will not let my ego get in the way.
- I will be of service.

Coaching Trees and Growth

Nothing accelerates a leader’s growth and knowledge base better than finding individuals who sit in a position that the leader desires to be in and tapping into their experiences. Identifying the right mentors, based on their situational knowledge and core values, is easier said than done, but the

challenge of creating a relentless learning environment is one you must take if you want to put yourself in the best possible position to succeed.

Coaches can not only help you make the right decisions at the right time, but they can also save you from making the same kinds of mistakes they have made in their own leadership roles, and from paying the same prices for those mistakes.

An understanding of how to create a mentorship tree, not only for yourself but for your other team members, is key for any organization because this additional guidance fosters the personal and professional development that creates sustainable value throughout the organization.

Successful organizations are set up such that even if you're a coach or a mentor, you are always a mentee as well. This enables you to leverage two things that make a company successful: relationship capital and situational knowledge. You have relationship capital if you utilize the "ask and attract" methodology (see section on branding below). If you and your team members are all capable of doing that, your relationship capital will expand—and at the same time, you will also leverage your team's collective situational knowledge.

The efficiency and productivity of your decisions will rise exponentially if you are focused on leveraging situational knowledge. This can be accomplished in two ways. One is to give help. "Hey, this is how you should do it. I've been here before. Here are the mistakes that I made." The second way is through accessing your relationship capital. People need the relationship capital in place that can assist them with identifying the right production system, the best method of quality control, and so on.

Being Humble Enough to Ask for Help

Identify those people who have the right situational knowledge or experience or who sit in a position that you want to be in. To do that, you have to be one thing: radically humble. Realize that most people love to give. Most people freely give their advice to those that value it. Most people love to share their experience, their situational knowledge. Even their relationship capital—most people love to give to those they emotionally connect with. The reason they love to give is ego based. It's really not a humble thing at all. They feel separate or superior when they're giving, and in a scarce world, they feel better about themselves when they give. You can always identify humble people because not only can they give unconditionally (without expectation or trading), but they can also ask for help.

The practice of humility opens your world to new skills and knowledge, key components for people who strive for greatness in their decision making. Take Kobe Bryant, for example. Most know him as one of the best scorers in NBA history, a champion by any definition of the word. But Bryant did not let his previous successes cloud his judgment when starting the media portion of his career. He was humble enough to call upon others who had different skill sets and a different knowledge base, and that's why his early forays into media, such as his Oscar Award-winning short film *Dear Basketball*, have been such a hit with audiences.

Don't Trip on the First-Down Chains Behind You

Your past should inform your decision making, but you cannot let your perspective of the past interfere with your future progress. An overreliance on your past can cause issues with your ego, such as a lack of forgiveness, that will unduly influence your decisions going forward and impair your ability to make the right call. Like a young quarterback, you need to have the right approach to "the game" in order to excel, regardless of any pressure that is put on you or pressure you might put on yourself.

The perception of our past is a huge problem in business, and this can be seen in the three realms of belief. We consciously trip on the first-down chains behind us by focusing too much on our past failures, shortcomings, or anxieties. Other times, subconsciously or unconsciously, we hold on to beliefs that are limiting.

Zone Coverage: The Comfort, Learning, and Anxiety Zones

When things don't feel right when making decisions, take the step to identify when you are in your comfort zone, learning zone, or anxiety zone. Like a pitcher with a full count, you want to be in the right part of the zone to best enjoy the pursuit of your potential. You can't do that when you're in a comfort zone, and you can't do that when you're in an anxiety zone. You can enjoy the pursuit of your potential only when you're in the learning zone.

The comfort zone is the area that you know like the back of your hand, and it takes no thought at all. It is made up of your conscious and unconscious competencies, things that you can execute with minimal effort or attention. Your comfort zone encompasses your decisions that you regularly make and that you're 100 percent confident in.

You need to have a learning zone outside of your comfort zone because it will allow you to expand and learn how to make harder and more complex decisions. Expand your comfort zone the way a butterfly breaking out of a cocoon strengthens its wings so it can fly. The learning zone is where you can appreciate the lessons that the universe gives you. It's the enjoyment of the pursuit of your potential. It's where we live. It's where we practice, making well-informed decisions.

When you're in the anxiety zone, you're pushing yourself too hard, which is just as bad as being in the comfort zone. This happens all the time. People get in their own way. They're perceiving that they're not getting done in time, they don't have enough time, or things aren't happening fast enough. They keep worrying about what they're going to do next. It's all time and ego, which leads to fear.

The only lesson you learn from making a decision when you're in the anxiety zone is *don't make decisions when you're in the anxiety zone*. Instead, first go back to the learning zone, then make the decision. Gratitude, empathy, accountability, and effective communication will take you back to the learning zone.

For example, to avoid biased or tilted decision making, you need to work on creating an appropriate mistake response, which is simply a strategy to help you go back to the learning zone. Imagine throwing a pitch and saying "thank you" when the guy hits a home run off of you—and forgiving yourself. Are you more likely to pitch the next batter better if you get mad at yourself, if you get mad at the catcher, mad at the coach, or get mad at the batter? Or do you think you might have a better chance if you say "thank you" and forgive yourself?

You should do this for only one reason: If you're thankful, forgiving, accountable, and communicating effectively with what inspires you, then you have a much better chance to continue the game and win.

Being in the Game

A team is unlikely to win the game they're playing today if they are focused on a future matchup. Persevering through lows, as well as maintaining composure through highs, comes from making today a focal point. Today is a day to make progress. We shouldn't worry about what has already happened or about what might happen in the future.

Maintaining a clear focus on today comes about when you

learn to master a couple of different mental strategies: understanding how faith works and learning to be consistent and persistent in the goals you chase, while also detaching your happiness from the outcome you seek.

You can enjoy the pursuit of your potential only when you're in the learning zone.

Faith Is a Two-Way Player

A lot of people think faith works in only one way. "I hope that this positive thing happens," whether it's a specific desire or a broad one. But when you put faith in what you *don't* have, that means you're not playing the game and you're not in the present.

If you put faith in your fears, you manifest your fears. "I'm going to fumble this ball." "I'm so worried they're going to score a touchdown on me." If you think these things, guess what happens? More often than not, your fears will come true. Think about it in terms of a relief pitcher. If you've got a great pitch that you rely on—take Mariano Rivera's cut fastball, for example—what makes more sense? Having faith in that cut fastball or worrying about the other pitches that you don't have in your arsenal?

The consistent, persistent enjoyment of the pursuit of your potential helps you work hard in the present not only to achieve your goals but also to be happy and fulfilled, whether you win the Super Bowl or not.

Go After Your Goals

To get what you want, you have to be consistent. Consistency is even more important than persistence because consistency breeds persistence—meaning, if you get in the habit of doing a particular thing every single day, quitting that habit is difficult.

What happens to people is that somewhere along the line, they think that their inspiration and persistent attitude are enough to keep going—and eventually they forget. Their momentum is gone, due to the zero effect. That's why when

people are trying to do things based on their perception of linear time—which is a man-made construct—they feel at the end of the month as if they have gotten no results despite relatively consistent effort. But if you did something for 28 out of 30 days, you zeroed out your progress two different times. The exponential growth factor and progress you can experience is reset each time you fail to work on that goal. Even though we feel that we've worked the entire month, missing two days costs you the desired outcome.

Phil Mickelson might not be the greatest golfer of all time, but he's up there, and that's because he's so consistent. He's one of the most skilled players of all time because he's been playing golf consistently and practicing during much of his spare time.

Consistency creates persistency. How can you do something every day and quit? These words don't even belong in the same sentence. You can be born with the greatest talents and gifts, but if you're not persistent and consistent in the use of those skills, you cannot achieve your fullest potential.

In addition, detach happiness from achievement. Attaching your goals to happiness is what leads to unhappiness. So many people grow up believing that an achievement will automatically mean happiness: "When I graduate from high school, I'm going to be so happy." "When I make my first million dollars, I'm going to be so happy." Guess what never comes? Your happiness.

Choosing to detach from an outcome can seem extremely conflictual, and it is hard for people to understand. Approach every situation contemplating how much value you can provide, and you will get value in return. At the same time as you're chasing your goals, you must understand that there is no defined "finish line." That's why it can be helpful to view the goals as the yard markers on a football field with no defined end zone. You might not know exactly where you are in relation to your goals, but paying attention to the yard markers as you progress can empower you to be confident in your pursuit of a touchdown.

The Offense and Defense of Branding

Finding the right balance of offense and defense is essential when determining how best to brand an individual, group, or company. And to find a brand message that reverberates in your target market, you must first understand the difference between a brand's frequency and its identity.

A *brand frequency* is a value proposition and emotional connection that is aligned with your target market or demographic, while a *brand identity* is the perception of your brand, combined with features and benefits associated with a brand's or organization's assets.

Finding a Frequency

The first step of branding something is to find its frequency. You want a brand that rings true to your audience, something aligned with their beliefs, desires, or aspirations. To connect to others and take your message, product, service, or solution mainstream to the biggest audience, you first need to fully understand who you are, what you're selling, how you're selling it, and the value that it brings to others. You need to understand how your frequency, or that of your product, resonates with others and attracts them to the brand that you're trying to establish.

To find your frequency, or the frequency of a brand, you need to take stock in what it *is*—not what others tell you it is or what they perceive it to be. So many times in life, we try to listen to other people to find our own frequency. The optimal approach is actually the exact opposite. By finding our own frequency of products, services, or solutions, we can attract the widest audience and access the people the brand should address.

When individuals don't know the frequency of what they're selling, they tend to listen to other people and make misguided, disingenuous, or misinformed decisions. You've got to know your frequency and believe in it.

Scoring Brand Points with Ask and Attract

On the offensive side of branding, the first step is to find your frequency. It is only when you know all of the assets that you have that you are able to defend that brand. The second step comes when you learn to ask and attract. That's an aggressive approach of building a brand.

Let's start with making an ask. If you have yourself as a product, service, or solution or if you have an existing product, service, or solution, and you've found the frequency of that brand, then you need to ask people if they would like to utilize it. If they wouldn't like it, it's not at their frequency; then you need to improve your statistical success by asking a second question: "Do you know anyone who might like it?" Those are the only two asks that you could have: "Do you want it?" or "Do you know somebody else who might want it?"

When it comes to communication, there is one overarching goal: Get your point across as clearly as possible when you are connecting with other people.

Attracts take a little bit more work to get down pat. These are messages designed to attract what we want. To use an attract efficiently, we put out a frequency that attracts people to gain their interest. For example, an attract could be as simple as a piece of digital content showing Red Sox fans celebrating the newest World Series win with their family, combined with a message related to a family ticket promotion.

When you stick to your frequency, connect to people emotionally, and actually make it a habit to ask and attract, a brand can go from the offensive, where we have to ask, to the defensive, where we can slow down and take time to deal with things such as a wait list for your product, service, or solution. Eventually, you'll have a frequency which vibrates at a speed that attracts so many people, you won't be able to handle the business. You'll have a brand so powerful that people will sleep outside for two days on the street to buy tickets to an event or to get the next version of your phone.

The Offense and Defense of Marketing

How do you find a combination of push and pull marketing (or ask and attract marketing) that best fits your products or services? Not only do you need to learn to get aligned with your target market before launching your marketing efforts, but you also must have a complete grasp of the value you hold. Knowing your value, and how that value compares to competitors in the market, will empower you to make yourself equal to your competition. This is the first step in differentiating yourself from others.

The AAA Strategy: Alignment, Action, Adjustment

The first thing you need to do in marketing is connect emotionally. How we connect emotionally to that which inspires and stimulates others is very simple when we put the AAA strategy into practice. First, we get aligned with our target market. To know what moves them, we have to know what their emotions and values are. Different things move people in different ways. If you are out of shape, you can be motivated by being marketed to with the emotions associated

with getting you into shape. Using Kevin Hart to market its shoes, Nike can evoke an emotion of competitiveness, of redemption, of underdog turned hero, of elevation, of self-awareness—all of that plus a bit of self-deprecation.

We spend 80 percent of our time getting aligned emotionally with the audience we want to ask or attract. Then we take action and prepare for adjustment, and in today's world, the way we prepare for adjustment in offensive and defensive marketing is simply by gathering data and analyzing it to the best of our ability.

Make Yourself Equal, Make Yourself Better

The second part of offensive and defensive marketing is to know the vibration of what you're marketing and how that can resonate with your audience. Knowing what differentiates your solution, product, service, and self gives you an unmatched competitive advantage.

If things have a different vibration, the first thing we have to do in marketing, offensively in asking or defensively by attracting, is make ourselves equal to our competitors. This means identifying the ways that we are the same, whether we provide the same service, similar features, or solve the same problem. Then we must make ourselves different from competitors. We locate our audience's current perceptions to connect emotionally, then take it to a higher level by differentiating ourselves.

The Offense and Defense of Communication

When it comes to communication, there is one overarching goal: Get your point across as clearly as possible when you are connecting with other people. This is how you make sure your message is conveyed and your team is aligned with your team goals and your overarching values.

There are three distinct keys to any interpersonal communication. Those are what content you choose to convey, the access you provide to that content, and the medium through which you choose to express the content. Failure to select

the right content, access, or medium is a nemesis of effective communication. That is why you need to elevate your awareness by paying close attention to the *way* you connect to others and by understanding *whom* you are connecting to.

The Two Ways to Connect and Communicate

We want to have everyone on our team on the same page, so that we're prepared to execute on the plan. Getting on the same page is foremost about establishing the connection between your team members, which happens in two different ways.

We first establish a connection by emotionally connecting to one person or a group. We connect emotionally when we talk about the things that are important to us. The second way to communicate is to connect to that which inspires you, whatever that may be. Inspiration is the fuel for your action. It's the fuel that goes through you to others. Inspiration allows us to do things that we can't even fathom doing.

Communication expert Frank Luntz used to say, "It's not what you say. It's what people hear." That's the crux of emotional communication. So many times, we perceive what others are saying factually and logically, but we're not connected emotionally. This can result in somebody's hearing the complete opposite of what we're intending to say.

Questioning is very important in communication because it brings clarity. Open-ended questions are normally asked when starting to get alignment. The overall goal of asking open-ended questions is to get stable data (correct information that enables and empowers us to make the right calls) in order to make an informed decision, but even more importantly, it allows you to emotionally connect to others or to that which inspires others.

We use close-ended questions to establish more logical alignment on top of our preexisting emotional connection. If you're selling customer relationship management (CRM) software and competing against Salesforce, you could start by asking open-ended questions such as, "What do you use today? What do you like about it? What don't you like about it?"

Then you could ask a close-ended question such as, "What if I were able to give you this particular functionality that you like, combined with this back-end support and this unique offering? Would you be interested?" A close-ended question usually has a "yes" or "no" answer.

It's not what we say. It's how we say it. So be a transformative communicator, and let things come through you. Make your communication clear and concise for others. When you are confident enough to share your vision, you can empower others to communicate effectively, and then empower others to do the same.

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Adapted by arrangement with McGraw-Hill Education LLC, from *Game-Time Decision Making: High-Scoring Business Strategies from the Biggest Names in Sports* by David Meltzer. Copyright © 2019 by McGraw-Hill Education LLC. 224 pages, ISBN 978-1-2604-5261-7.

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