

Chili and Your Intuition 8 ingredients for making better strategic decisions

By Jeff Mowatt



As a business owner or manager, what you ultimately rely on most when deciding your company's future, is your intuition. The challenge with so many stakeholders relying on you to make the 'right' decision, is ensuring that your instincts are reliable. Effective leaders hone their intuition the way a chef cooks a pot of chili. Like chili, intuition needs to include the right ingredients and then be allowed to simmer a while. Here are eight ingredients for you to stew on.

1. Get customer coaching

Even as a senior executive, you'll end up making better decisions after spending some time at the front line talking directly with customers. Ask them the key question, "What can we do to improve our service?"

2. Listen to those in-the-know

It's an understatement to point out that Sam Walton had good business instincts. Wal-Mart's founder said, "*Listen to everyone in your company, especially the ones who actually talk to customers. They really know what's going on out there.*" 'Nuff said.

3. Ask your competitors - really

I'm not just referring to visiting your competitor's store. If you are in a service industry there may not be a store per se to visit. One of the best ways to learn from the competition is to join your professional trade association. There are associations for virtually every occupation on the planet. I've always found that when it comes to joining a professional association, the more you get involved and contribute to the group, the more you ultimately receive. Give a lot to your association and your competitors will share a lot with you.

4. Read by listening

Business books are filled with great ideas; providing you actually read them. As a time saver, consider buying your books on audio so you can listen while driving. I subscribe to a service that sends me summarized audio recordings of two business books each month. I find myself listening to books I wouldn't otherwise read and I invariably get at least one good idea from every summary.

5. Get some seminar smarts

Some folks seem to think that once they complete their formal schooling, there is no need to continue with their education. That's like exercising in college and then figuring we can sit on the couch for the rest of our lives. Learning isn't an event; it's a lifelong endeavor. Make a practice of attending seminars and training sessions. A bonus of learning with others is that you have the opportunity to exchange ideas, network, and - provided you have a skilled facilitator - end up having some fun and stress relief.

6. Learn the unwritten rules

You may have a wonderful new idea for your company, but if it clashes with the culture, you'll soon face resistance and subversion. Savvy individuals learn where the company has come from so that they can reinforce and uphold closely held values as they introduce change.

7. Clarify your code

We all read the headlines of high profile managers facing criminal charges. Apparently, their primary moral code is maximizing short term profits at all cost. Increasingly, individual managers are being held personally accountable by shareholders, government regulators, and consumers for their ethics. When making strategic decisions, ask yourself, "Is this the *right* way to conduct our business?" I found that since I clarified my personal values and priorities, my business decisions aren't always as expedient, but they certainly are better for my reputation over the long term. Over the long term, your personal reputation is everything.

8. Get smarter by going slower

When it comes to honing your intuition, keep in mind one of the great myths in business that you need to fill every waking moment with activity. Patricia Katz is a professional speaking colleague and friend who speaks and writes about the value of giving yourself, "Permission to Pause." After attending her presentation, it occurred to me that those individuals, particularly managers, who slow down and reflect

are often the most creative, adaptive, and, ironically, productive. Think of the leader from the employee's perspective. Who would you rather work for? A person who's running frantically where everything is an emergency, or someone who seems to be in control, has a sense of perspective and a clear idea of the direction to take the company? Perhaps it's time to give yourself, "Permission to Pause."



When you take all these ingredients, mix em' up, and chew on em' a while. Chances are you'll end up making wiser decisions for your organization. That's a flavor all your company's stakeholders will enjoy. Bon Appetite!

About the author:

This article is based on Jeff's book, [Becoming a Service Icon in 90 Minutes a Month](http://www.jeffmowatt.com) by customer service strategist and international speaker Jeff Mowatt. To learn more about his book and organization, visit www.jeffmowatt.com

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