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The Decision Maker: Unlock the Potential of Everyone in Your Organization, One Decision at a Time

Dennis Bakke
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The Decision Maker is a cleverly crafted tale about Tom Anderson, the new owner of a manufacturing firm who decides to spread decision-making throughout the organization. Parables have become a popular staple of business books, and Dennis Bakke, who wrote the bestselling *Joy at Work: A Revolutionary Approach to Fun on the Job*, knows this well. His story features many qualities that mirror a good novel: a realistic scenario, a cast of interesting characters, some good old-fashioned suspense, and a few surprising twists, all of which make for very engaging reading.

One of the more interesting aspects of the story is Bakke's ability to demonstrate the impact of hands-off delegation on individuals and the organization. Anderson never veers from his commitment to letting the most appropriate individuals in the company make decisions, even though his partner and a major investor are skeptical about the wisdom of releasing such control. As the story unfolds, it becomes clear that decisions made by lower-ranking employees may, in fact, be superior to decisions made by managers who are several steps removed from a situation. Still, the author stresses the importance of implementing an advice process before making a final decision. As Bakke's alter ego, Tom Anderson, says, "The bigger the decision, the more people you ask."

It is Anderson's new policy on making decisions that ultimately uncovers a serious manufacturing error, resulting in the need to disclose the error to a government agency. The disclosure carries with it the risk of a significant fine as well as loss of business. Bakke uses this portion of the story to address an ethical dilemma and demonstrate that, while doing the right thing may have consequences, engaging in a cover-up could be far worse.

After the story concludes, Bakke provides the reader with a wrap-up that summarizes the "basic assumptions of a decision-maker culture," the qualities of decision makers, and how an advice process works. This additional material nicely complements the fictional tale.

By constructing a story that shows the complexity of interpersonal relationships in a manufacturing environment, Dennis Bakke does an admirable job of showing how giving employees the power to make decisions can itself be a challenging decision. Nevertheless, the outcome suggests that the rewards of spreading decisions throughout an organization significantly outweigh the risks. *The Decision Maker* is a complete package that includes both an illustrative, realistic example and the background necessary for the reader who wants to successfully implement organizational decision-making. This is a book that is both enjoyable to read and useful for any business executive.

BARRY SILVERSTEIN (February 26, 2013)

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