

Decision-Making in Times of Uncertainty

A conversation with Cheryl Strauss Einhorn



From Journalist to Decision Expert

- **Investigative Roots:** Began career as an award-winning journalist, uncovering complex stories in business and finance.
- **Pattern Recognition:** Noticed that behind every high-stakes decision was a human challenge of how people gather, interpret, and act on information.
- **Turning Curiosity Inward:** Shifted focus to understanding decision-making to think about the larger impact decision-making has on others.
- **Created the AREA Method:** Developed a research-based framework to help individuals and teams make complex decisions with clarity, confidence, and integrity.
- **Teaching and Tools:** Now equips leaders, organizations, and students with practical systems to slow down thinking, question assumptions, and navigate uncertainty effectively.



Decision-Making Matters

Good decision-making isn't just about choosing — it's about how we choose.

We can't control outcomes, but we can control our process.

Most of our stress doesn't come from uncertainty, it comes from how we handle it.

We often default to patterns — confirmation bias, or over confidence.

Improving our decision process results in better problem solving overall.



Seeing Beyond the Problem

The Problem:

- Most decisions fail not because of poor execution, but because we rarely see *the real the problem and solution clearly*.
- People often rush to solutions, carrying their own assumptions and blind spots into the decision-making.

The Solution:

- Identify Your Vision of Success and Critical Concepts
- This shift centers the thinking on what's truly valuable about solving the problem and clarifies the guardrails that define it.



Vision of Success and Critical Concepts

Take your open ended question and flip it to be a close ended solution.

From “I am deciding if...”
To “I will be successful when...”

You should end up with one - three components that are:

1. Important to You
2. Specific to your problem
3. Measureable or researchable

Seeing Beyond Our Perspective

The Problem:

- Our brains are wired for shortcuts — we rely on assumptions, patterns, and emotions to make sense of complexity.
- These cognitive biases limit our ability to see other perspectives.
- As a result, we make decisions that reflect our comfort zones, not the full reality of the problem.

The Solution:

- Use the BIAS Framework to check your own assumptions about the problem:
 - Behavior
 - Information
 - Analysis
 - Structure



Bias Framework

Behavior: What is my usual pattern?

Information: How easy/necessary is it to find data?

Analysis: How confident am I about synthesizing the information and why?

Structure - What constraints are there about solving the problem that I should take into account?

Considering Failure

The Problem:

- Most teams plan for success but rarely plan for what could go wrong.
- Without exploring potential failure, we fall prey to overconfidence, optimism bias, and blind spots.
- When challenges arise, we react instead of adapt — wasting time, trust, and resources.

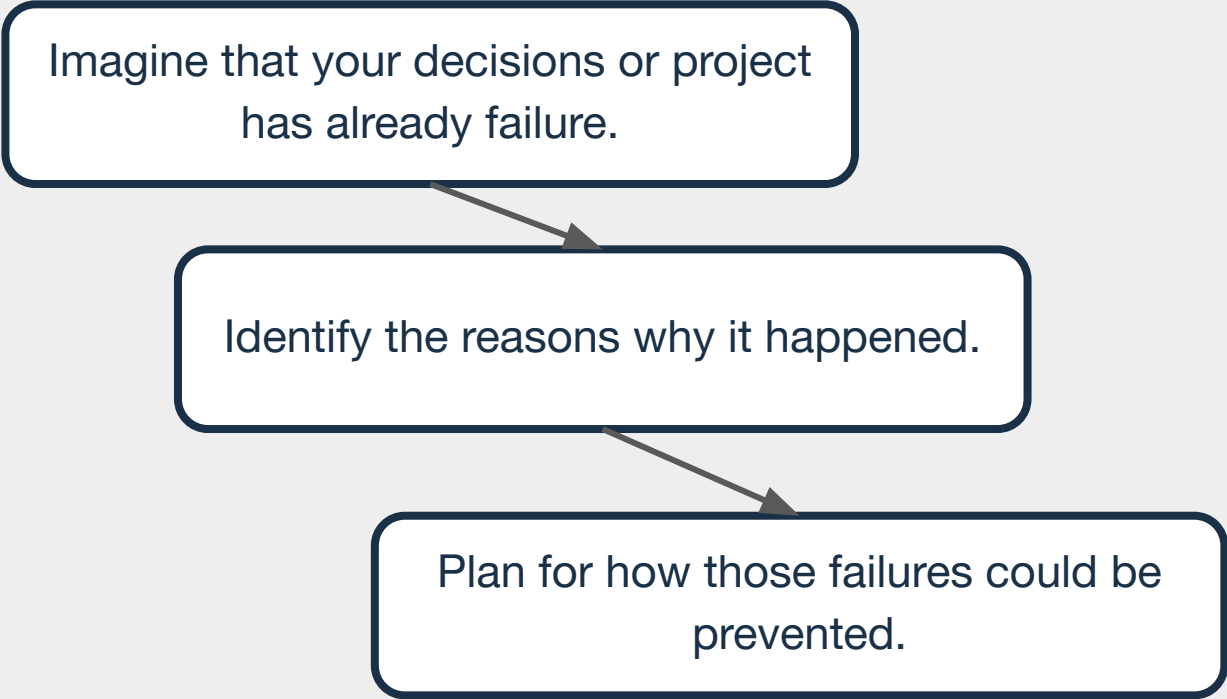
The Solution:

- Use a Pre-Mortem to imagine the decision has already failed — and ask why.
- This process surfaces hidden risks, pressures, and weak points before they derail success.
- It helps teams reframe failure from fear to foresight — turning uncertainty into preparation.



Strength-Testing the Decision With a Pre-Mortem

Imagine that your decisions or project has already failure.



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graph TD; A[Imagine that your decisions or project has already failure.] --> B[Identify the reasons why it happened.]; B --> C[Plan for how those failures could be prevented.];
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The diagram illustrates a three-step process for strength-testing a decision using a pre-mortem. It consists of three rectangular boxes with rounded corners and dark blue borders, arranged in a descending staircase pattern from top-left to bottom-right. Each box contains a step in the process, and the steps are connected by dark blue arrows pointing downwards and to the right.

Identify the reasons why it happened.

Plan for how those failures could be prevented.

Final Thoughts

- **Focus on process, not prediction.** You can't eliminate uncertainty, but you can strengthen how you think through it.
- **Clarity over certainty.** When the future is unclear, anchor decisions in values and clear success criteria—not in false confidence.
- **Experiment and adjust.** Treat every decision as a working hypothesis. Learn, iterate, and adapt.
- **AI expands information; judgment gives it meaning.** The quality of output depends on the clarity of input.

