
MONDAY MANNA
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THE BOTH/AND APPROACH TO DECISION MAKING

By Stephen R. Graves

Often the most difficult decisions business and professional leaders must make are not between issues that are black and white – obviously right or wrong – but between two shades of gray. For instance, a CEO friend who owns a family business is pondering firing his unethical sister. Another of my friends is debating whether to give a second chance for an underperforming best-friend employee who is dragging the company down.

What entrepreneur has not struggled with feeling the need to put in a lot of overtime at work but also knowing their spouse is struggling with their children's behavior at home and wanting support? Many times, deciding what to do does not have easy, simple answers. Should I fire her or not? Should I let him go or keep him on, hoping he can improve? Should I choose work demands or family needs?

We could phrase the questions a different way: Should I be kind or be a good steward? Should I be wise or be forgiving? Should I fulfill my duty at work or fulfill my duty at home?

The solution can be 'Both/And.' In some decisions, instead of flipping a coin to reach an arbitrary decision, we must bring both sides of the coin into the equation. We must consider multiple realities. I like what Chip and Dan Heath report in their book, *Decisive*. They quote one expert who says, "Any time in life you're tempted to think, 'Should I do this OR that?' instead, ask yourself, 'Is there a way I can do this AND that?' It is surprisingly frequent that it is feasible to do both things." We could call this "both/and decision making."

God is a God of 'Both/And.' Theologian Wayne Grudem writes, "Everything [God] says or does is consistent with all His attributes." God does not flip the coin and choose one character quality or another. With Him, it is always both/and. In other words, God is always: Grace and Truth; Loving and Wrathful; Merciful and Just; Wise and Generous; Joyful and Grieving over sin.

Two truths held in tension. Embracing two truths held in tension has helped me navigate some of the trickiest decisions I've faced over the last few years. For example: Community is held in tension with personal responsibility. Compassion is held in tension with justice. Generosity is held in tension with stewardship. Forgiveness is held in tension with accountability.

I mentioned an example of a best friend not working hard and having to make a decision about it, but feeling pulled in two apparently different directions. You know Jesus says, "Forgive without end" (Matthew 18:22), but the executive in you knows the apostle Paul also wrote, "If

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you don't work, you don't eat" (2 Thessalonians 3:10). What do you do? Should you offer forgiveness or hold him accountable? What would it look like to be gracious and be a good steward of the company?

Rather than fire him or look the other way (either/or decision making), what if you gave the individual six more weeks to prove himself with measurable goals? He gets the graciousness of one more chance, and you get either enhanced productivity or a reasonable time and means for letting him go. That is both/and decision making. This also comes into play in trying to balance home and work, or as we consider personal generosity. Both/and decision-making tensions may be hard to embrace, but they make for a richer and more authentic life and work.

© 2023. Dr. Stephen R. Graves describes himself as an organizational strategist, pragmatic theologian, and social capitalist. He advises executives and business owners, as well as young entrepreneurs. He is author of numerous books and many articles, and a public speaker.

Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. Can you relate to the difficult decisions that are described, ones that are not “black and white” – easily resolved – but rather ones with multiple, often-conflicting factors to consider? Give an example of one you had to deal with.
2. What are your thoughts about the idea of God being a “both/and” God, that sometimes His attributes seem to be in conflict? How does that make you feel as you see His help in seeking to arrive at fair and right decisions?
3. The problem of seeking to achieve a proper balance for both work and personal life in mentioned. How have you tried to address pressing demands at work along with your responsibilities at home with your family?
4. What is another area of tension that you have wrestled with at times? For instance, the challenge of wanting to be generous and at the same time, being a good steward of the resources God has entrusted to you? Or being forgiving when the offending party should face consequences of their wrongdoing?

NOTE:

If you have a Bible and would like to read more, consider the following passages:

Psalms 145:8-9; Isaiah 30:18; Matthew 5:33-37, 43-47; Luke 19:11-27; Ephesians 2:3-5

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