

WEEK

# 10 DECISION MAKING

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Position: -46.9333,  
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12:56:00 UTC

Next Week:  
Forces of Nature

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**By Rich Wilson, Skipper  
Great American IV**

Decision-making in my immediate context of a Southern Ocean gale is about risk and return. My goal is to get safely to Cape Horn. We have another 36-48 hours of this storm to go. That is a long time for the boat and skipper to be at risk. And we have an immediately sad example of that risk in the dismasting today of Enda O'Coineen's boat on the other side of this storm.

So the first goal is to get through this storm. And the second goal is to get through the storm that is following behind it. So do we try to go faster, with more risk, in this storm, to be able to get out of the way of the second storm? Or should we be safer and more conservative in this storm, and then deal with the second storm when it arrives? After all, the forecast of that storm may change for the better, or for the worse, but it is far from certain now.

We have chosen to be safer now to give ourselves the best chance to get through this gale. Toward this, we have much less sail area up than is called for by the performance specifications of the boat. They want us to have 2 reefs in the mainsail, plus the staysail. We have 3 reefs in the mainsail plus the storm jib.

Another factor is that we must make sure that the staysail, our workhorse sail, is in good shape when we get to the Atlantic. So should we add any risk to that sail for the benefit of a few extra knots of speed in the storm? If we go a little faster, will that save us from the second storm? It gets complicated quickly!

Plus, for me, one has to sail according to one's nature, and for me that is being conservative. If I have the storm jib, I can get some sleep in and be better rested than if I have the staysail and are going faster, but bouncing and ricocheting off the waves, and unable to sleep.

Every decision, at sea or in life, has different inputs to the risk and return equation. They must be weighed carefully with their consequences to attain a final decision.



**by Dr. Brien Barnewolt  
Tufts Medical Center**

When was the last time you had to think hard about making a decision? Often our everyday decisions are easy, and the consequences aren't likely to be life or death. At other times, decisions can be very difficult and the decision that you make can have life altering effects. Making difficult decisions can be broken down into a specific step-wise process that can help lead to positive outcomes. What is your goal and will your decision help get you to your goal?

When I work in the emergency department, my team is constantly making decisions that affect our patients. We must decide which patient to see first (the sickest usually get priority) and then decide what we need to do to make someone better. Some decisions are hard to make and sometimes we need to do things that may be uncomfortable for our patient, but in the end, we know that our patient will get better, which is our goal. Above all else, we need to make sure that we "do no harm." We strive to make good decisions so we don't make our patients worse.

Rich is also constantly making decisions that will allow him to finish the race in the fastest time possible for him. Some of Rich's top priorities are for his boat and for himself. While he makes hundreds of decisions every day, the first questions he must always answer is what effect

will his decision have on his boat or on himself. Will more sail or less sail protect the boat? Should he take a nap or stay awake? Should he go faster and finish sooner or slow down and be safer?

Rich recently encountered a violent weather system and if he had maintained his boat speed, he would have run directly into the worst part of the storm, potentially damaging his boat and maybe himself! Instead, he made the decision to slow down, letting the storm pass in front of him and avoiding very dangerous sailing conditions.

Remember, without an intact boat and an intact skipper, there can be no successful race- and that is the goal to keep in mind when making decisions in the Vendée Globe!



## NEWS EXPLORER

Find examples of decision making in a newspaper or online. What was the problem or decision? Go through the decision making process that was used. What factors that affected the choice that was made? Was the outcome what the decision-maker anticipated? Was there an alternative solution that would have had a different result?

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