

# FOREWORD



The opening paragraph of Dieter Jansen’s book, *Decision Point*, instantly made me want to read on. This, in my humble opinion, is mostly a clue to the rest of the content and it generally turns out to be a great read. This one certainly was.

What makes this book authentic is Dieter’s use of his own life and leadership examples which move away from the generally borrowed theory found in many so-called leadership books. Building on the point of authenticity, Dieter’s focus on respecting and treating people right is truly refreshing and a lost “art” in our digital age of distant leadership. The deepest authenticity of *Decision Point* is the acknowledgment of God’s daily involvement in the lives of humankind. Leadership is, after all, God’s idea.

Much research and times of deep reflection must have taken place for this book to be written in final form. It is a “now” message for leaders at every level and it is an especially useful book in the hands of up-and-coming leaders who are hungry for mentoring. Emerging leaders, who are willing to follow the pioneers who have created a path for new minds to emulate and to learn from while adding their own discoveries in this new era, will find this leadership journey a memorable one. The

practical aspect of *Decision Point* is that you get to rate your leadership approach and it is very effective and mostly accurate for each individual. Enjoy this smart and well thought-through application as much as I did.

I believe that *Decision Point* will be displayed among the titles of many other great books on leadership that have been written throughout the decades.

*Angelique du Toit*

AUTHOR | INSPIRATIONAL SPEAKER | PODCASTER | PANELIST | BLOGGER  
VIRTUALLY ANYWHERE

# INTRODUCTION



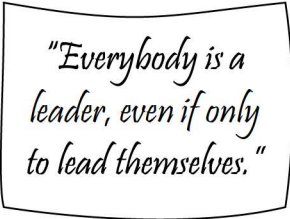
Life is messy.

Messy situations can happen anytime, anywhere. It's that discussion with a co-worker who puts you in a conflict situation; an employee you may need to let go; unintended consequences of an action; being called into an office and put on the spot; a spouse who wants to leave; a child who reveals they have an addiction; a secret that someone told you that now compromises your position; or even just a reaction to a situation. No matter how well you've planned it out, how many books you've read, how many insurance policies you've bought, there will be a time, actually many times, when life becomes messy. The circumstances may be of your own doing, the doings of others, accidents or real "acts of God", but you will find yourself slap-bang in the middle of a mess. You have to nail your colors to the mast and make a decision. This is a *Decision Point!*

Messy times require sound leadership. You have to navigate through them. Your choices and decisions, beliefs and mindsets, and words and actions during these times will not only define who you become, but they will also reveal who you are to yourself and others. Sometimes you will be proud of how you

have coped, and other times you will know that you have fallen short. Don't worry, that's how all leaders fare, even the ones we think always get everything right.

Do we really need another leadership book? Look around you to see what is happening right there within your inner circle. Everybody is a leader, even if only to lead themselves. Everybody's actions have an impact on others—positive or negative. Everybody makes decisions every day. This book talks less about leadership being about strategy and tactics, but rather focuses on character, values and motives. If you can lead yourself well, in time, you will naturally lead others. This is a book for anybody with a pulse.



*"Everybody is a leader, even if only to lead themselves."*

We learn leadership from others from the day we are born. We learn it from parents, friends, teachers, TV, and a myriad of other sources. We learn it from both positive and negative sources, and if we are mindful about it, we can use all of that knowledge well. All too often the role models we are either blessed or cursed with, subconsciously determine our actions, and we morph into their mold, sometimes even while knowing that there must be a better way. We simply don't have an example of what that better way might be, because we have blindly accepted the role models that have been thrown our way.

That said, the point of this book is not what others have done. The question is: *What will you choose to do?* It's simply too late to wait until the mess hits us in the face to find out what we are made of. We would do better by intentionally seeking

out that which we choose to be. I would have so appreciated it if my dad, a good dad by most standards, had taught me that early in life—that sense of being intentional, and therefore in control of my own development. I thought it would just happen, and developing a five-year plan was as foreign to me then as a cassette tape is to my daughter now. In retrospect, maybe he did try and tell me, but I wasn't listening...

Looking at my own development as a person and leader, there have been many decision points, beliefs and thoughts that challenged and shaped what I now believe a good leader to be. No doubt, there will be more. I was not the uber-leader in my younger years, at school and varsity and such, so I had a lot to learn. My own leadership bar was initially low, but through application, and eventually intention, my skills improved dramatically.

We are all familiar with the inspiring accounts of Gandhi, Mandela, Mother Teresa, various movie personalities and so forth. While important and invaluable for our inspiration, I have purposely not used these well-known nuggets of wisdom and put in some of my own. I did this for two reasons:

Firstly, authenticity. Much of this book will be about examining and criticizing internal issues of belief, character and behavior, and quite frankly, I have a tough enough job doing that with myself without pretending to be in a position to know other people well enough to do it.

Secondly, accessibility. If you are like me, then you will look at some of these well-known examples with a certain degree of awe and feel that they must have possessed something special



to become who they did. I prefer you to think, “Well, if that guy can have some success, then so can I.”

Finally, while these are my examples, that is *all* they are—examples. This book is not about me, it is about you. In writing this book, I hope to inspire you to learn more about yourself. I’m providing a framework based on certain decision points that have formed my leadership style, and if you follow with me, you will have the space to think through and build your own decision-point framework.

At the back of the book I have set up your own canvas for you to paint on. As we go through the stages, you will think through the questions and fill in your own framework.

Most importantly, I hope this book will inspire you to think how your leadership style impacts others, whether you lead yourself, your home, your family, a large organization, or all of the above. By making some small adjustments, your effectiveness as a leader will be dramatically improved, as well as the effectiveness of the future leaders... who are inspired by you.

# SETTING THE SCENE: THE DECISION POINT HOUSE



*“One of the dominant themes from our research is that breakthrough results come about by a series of good decisions, diligently executed and accumulated one on top of another.”*

— Jim Collins, *Good to Great*.<sup>1</sup>

**T**he cover of this book depicts a maze of decision points connected by pathways. Once we make a decision, we travel along a particular path, until we hit the next decision point, and so on. Decision points are interlinked, and the results of decisions we have made earlier will impact how we make the next decision.

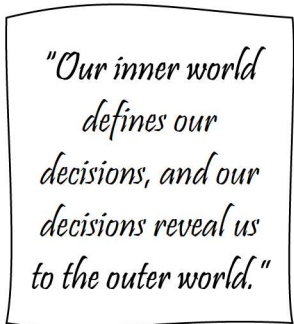
However, not all decision points are created equal. Some are at a core level that defines why we even exist, others will reveal what we stand for, and still others are determined, in part, by the particular circumstances we find ourselves in. But all decisions do stack up eventually, and our foundational beliefs and character decision points will reveal themselves in our behavioral decisions, and how we show up in the world.

As a practical example, consider two dentists. Neither of them had been coerced into becoming a dentist by various pressures or the perception of making a lot of money. These two dentists both felt passionately that this was what they wanted to do and could not think of doing anything else. At this point we might assume they would be quite similar. A dedicated dentist is a dedicated dentist, right?

However, what if they had different views on life and where they could best serve in their profession? Supposing one had a heart for the elderly, and the other was drawn to working with actors and supermodels. The first would be involved in restoring dignity for people, the second would be enhancing individuals' careers. All subsequent decisions would flow from that. Would the dental practice be situated in an accessible area on the ground floor, or would it be in a trendy high rise? Would it be simple and functional, or would it be upmarket with a lounge? What kind of staff would they hire? How and what would they charge? And how would the dentist be dressed and groomed? These may sound like simple strategies to attract the right customers, but it's more than just that; it's an expression of who the dentists are! If we took those two dentists, completely fulfilled by what they do, and exchanged them—moved the Hollywood dentist to the Retirement Home dentist's practice and vice versa—in a short time both dentists would feel like they were wasting their time and not doing what they believed in. If left long enough, they would gradually, but inevitably migrate their practices to resemble their beliefs and convictions.



Like the two dentists, our inner world defines our decisions, and our decisions reveal us to the outer world. Therefore, our inner beliefs and convictions define who we ultimately become. It is wise to be awake and intentional when making the decisions that support, and add to, the beliefs we choose. These decisions have the potential of lasting a lifetime, or even longer, through the impact we have on others. Looking back at the decisions that I've had to make in my life, I recognize that they can be placed on one of three levels, namely:



*"Our inner world defines our decisions, and our decisions reveal us to the outer world."*

1. **Foundational** decision points are decisions that are at my very core; convictions and beliefs that I have chosen and that I effectively bet my life on. This is *why* I exist.
2. **Character** decision points are decisions that have shaped my values and ethics, and are strongly informed by the foundational beliefs. This is *what* I stand for.
3. **Behavioral** decision points are the decisions that have formed the basis of my leadership style and expression. They are in alignment with my foundational beliefs and character traits, but these decisions' outcomes could be dependent on current circumstances. This is *how* I show up.

However, our stories don't begin simply with the decisions we make. Before we become aware of even making decisions, our frame of reference, or environment, has shaped many of our

thoughts and beliefs. We adopt these from our parents, our culture, and our day-to-day experiences. Before we can make truly informed decisions, we need to investigate which basic beliefs our environment has instilled within us, and decide whether they are valid and helpful, or flawed and ineffective.

It makes sense to me to show this in the form of a picture. Because I'm thinking of a "foundation" and an "environment", an image of a house seems to be a logical framework. For ease of use I've also given each environmental reference topic and each decision point a simple name that indicates what it is about. The whole picture is in the context of leadership, and the entire house would be the sum total of decision blocks, and therefore represents me.

The "**References**" section comprises the circumstances that have come my way over time that I have simply adopted. In the house framework these would be represented by the references that are considered when designing a house, such as landscape, style, other existing homes that serve as examples, building guidelines, prevailing weather patterns, etc. Those that are relevant are adopted, others are ignored, and some are specifically decided against. I've defined eight environmental topics (or references) for myself, namely: Ambiguity, Authority, Assumption, Example, Uncertainty, Culture, Drivers and Focus. We'll look at these in depth in Part A.

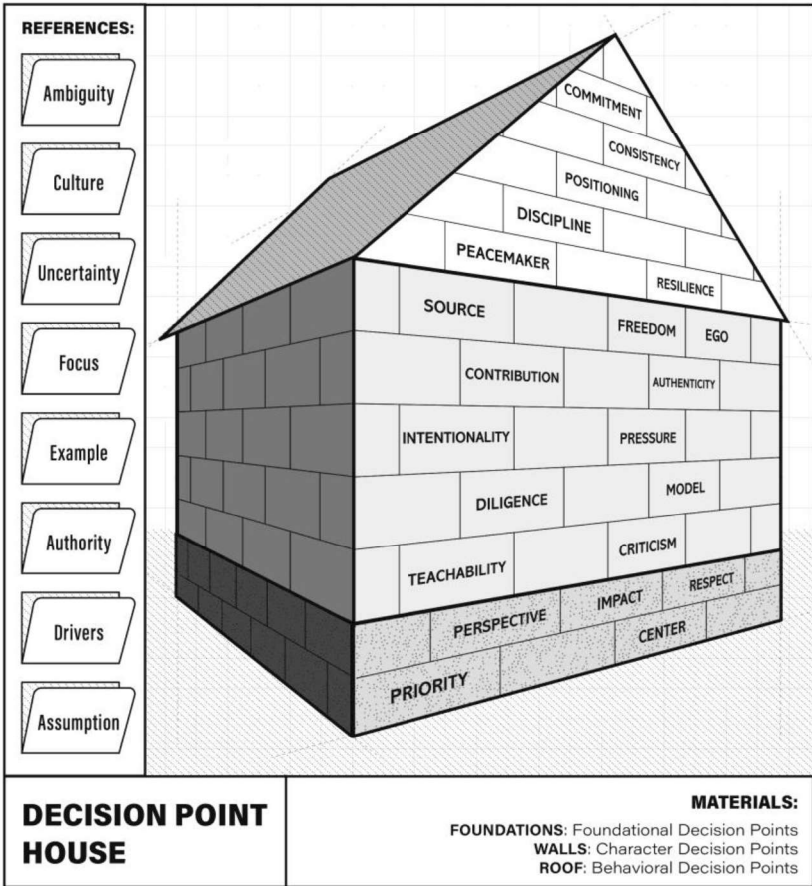
The **foundation** consists of my foundational decision points—the beliefs that I have adopted. In the framework these are the bricks that are below ground. How these blocks are put together determines the potential height, breadth and shape of the house. I've identified five foundational decision points,

namely: Impact, Respect, Center, Priority and Perspective. They are explained in detail in Part B.

The **walls** are built with my character decision points. In the framework these are the bricks in the walls. They form the bulk of the outward appearance of the house, and determine whether the house is attractive, functional... or some other adjective. They define the character of the house. I've defined eleven such character decision points for myself, namely: Contribution, Model, Teachability, Authenticity, Freedom, Ego, Pressure, Criticism, Intentionality, Source and Diligence. They are also explained in detail in Part B.

The **roof** is laid out with my behavioral decision points. In the framework these are the roof tiles, and they can be replaced and interchanged without severely impacting the rest of the house. I've defined six behavioral decision points for myself, namely: Commitment, Resilience, Discipline, Positioning, Consistency and Peacemaker. They are explained in detail in Part B.

The house is built over time, and as decision points are reached, certain flaws may be revealed. Reference factors may also change, which require a revamp of some of the house's aspects. And, of course, there is the never-ending task of maintenance, to ensure that the house stands strong. We may even consider some major renovations over time as the events in our lives unfold. Just like a physical house, it is always a work in progress in some form.



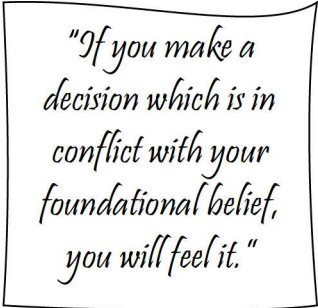
## Cracks in the Foundation

The foundational decision points will impact all other decision points. Cracks in the foundation will propagate up into the walls and even the roof. Decisions will not be robust or



consistent, and the house that has been built could be in danger of toppling if left long enough. At best, it will limit what the house is capable of achieving.

If you make a decision that is in conflict with your foundational belief, you will feel it. It will not be long before a cognitive dissonance arises that will urge you to make a change. In practical terms, this could be a situation at work where you have to take an action that goes against a core belief. You might even have witnessed some injustice happening and doing something about it would be costly, but keeping quiet becomes extremely uncomfortable.

A quote enclosed in a hand-drawn rectangular box with a slightly wavy top edge. The text is written in a cursive, italicized font.

*"If you make a decision which is in conflict with your foundational belief, you will feel it."*

Another possibility is that you are not yet aware of having to make a certain foundational decision. For example, if you have not set any goals in life, you can work in any job that seems appropriate. In the house analogy, you may be building a house, walls and all, only to discover later that it isn't the design you want, and you have to start over, or settle for what you have.

On the other hand, you may avoid making a foundational decision because it is inconvenient, or painful. The crack in the foundation is plastered closed with justifications and blind eyes, but the effects are felt in character issues and day-to-day decisions. This may be an addiction of some sort that you are unwilling to face, or a known false belief that you choose to hang on to because it has some advantage. In both these cases you are dishonest with yourself.



Cracks and foundations don't do well together, and the sooner these are opened up and properly dealt with, the sooner your house will be able to carry the load for which it has been designed.

## **Cracks in the Walls**

Character decision points determine how the people whom we interact with see us. If you have a crack in the character part of your house, your behavioral decision points will be impacted. Other people will be affected, and this could change your future interactions. At the same time, the character crack could be a pointer to a crack in your foundation, so it must be investigated. However, if it is only a character crack, it can be fixed and restored with some care and work.

For example, you may have a habit of being overly critical, or not taking advice, or always justifying your own actions. These are annoying to your followers, could impact the trust relationship you have with others and make you less effective as a leader. However, the house, the person, is still inherently safe. Your ability to weather challenges may be compromised in the long run, though.

## **Cracks in the Roof Tiles**

Our behaviors will be a direct result of our character decision points, and even our foundational decision points. Within those boundaries, however, we have a certain degree of flexibility, and

circumstances will determine the decisions to be made. If we make a behavioral decision that is in conflict with our character, we may feel uncomfortable for a while, but we can move on. Generally, there is no massive harm done, and things can be rectified quite easily.

With regards to the behavioral decision points there is no single correct way of doing things. The same person can be faced with similar decision points but decide differently for a variety of reasons. This does not impact the integrity of the character decision points and will always be open to debate and criticism.

In the house analogy, if there is a crack in a roof tile, then replace the tile, and move on. If you want to change the color of the entire roof, you can do so without influencing the integrity of the house. The roof is still a necessary part of the house, though. It also helps to weather life's storms.

## **Major Alterations in Older Houses**

In our minds we tend to think that our houses are rock-solid and fixed, providing a place of peace and safety. If we are an “older” house, we could wrongly believe that we can't change things anymore. After all, the saying goes that you can't teach an old dog new tricks. This is simply not true. The truth is that doing something new requires change, and our learned comfort is what keeps us from making changes. We typically also have more to lose if we are going to make a substantial change later in life. However, it still remains a choice that we have full

control over, and if we have the desire to do something new or make big changes, it is well within our reach to do so.

## **It's My Perspective**

My house is made up of the decision points that I have been faced with, affected by or been party to at least once over the years. I believe everyone goes through a similar set of decisions, although your set of decisions may look different. You may even classify them differently. This book describes my perspective, and as such, my bias towards a certain course of action will probably show. That doesn't mean it is correct, it just means it's my perspective.

Whichever way you choose to categorize your decision points, remember that the foundational ones will have the most impact on your life and determine how you approach the other decisions. They are also potentially the most elusive, because whether you're aware of them or not, you have certain beliefs. These could serve you... or work against you. I would urge you to spend time with a program or coach to investigate these beliefs, and either solidify them if they are valid or replace them if they are unhelpful.

## **Your Perspective**

Your perspective may be completely different to mine. You may find some of my foundational decision points are your character decision points and so on. You may also find some of my

decision points are not at all valid in your circumstances. You most likely will also find some additional decision points that I haven't identified.

After every section in the book, there are a few questions with spaces for answers. I would strongly encourage you not to answer the questions with the first thoughts that pop up in your mind, but to first take five minutes to *think* about what you are thinking about. In this way you will get the most value out of your time investment. Finally, a summary table and a blank "Decision Point House" framework is included in Part C of this book. Transferring your answers into these will give you a more complete picture of how you make decisions, and how your house is defined.

Ultimately, it's your perspective that will mean the most to you, and having thought about it and then built your "Decision Point House", I'll guarantee that you will begin to notice and recognize how your decision points show up in your life and in your leadership journey.