



HIGH SCHOOL MATH TEACHER ADDS A NEW BASIC

Reading, Math, Science, Language Arts — and How to Make Decisions

For the past five years, students in Bob Loew’s math classes at Foothill High School in Pleasanton, Calif., have been tackling a new subject that goes beyond the traditional basics. After they’ve completed their course requirements, Bob introduces them to an important, but largely neglected, life skill — how to make good decisions.

“Every day kids are making decisions that shape their lives,” says Bob. “Most act without fully considering their options or thinking through what matters most to them in the long run. I teach them how to apply math in a relevant way that helps them to think critically and make better decisions in both their school and personal lives.”



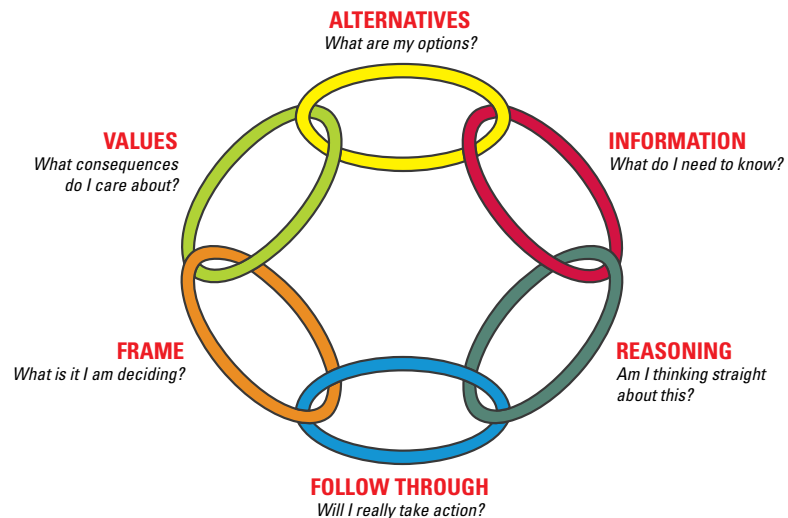
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During a special three-week enrichment module, Bob teaches his students the principles of sound decision making, as they explore information gathering and probability theory in real-life settings. First, they apply the new skills to a series of generic decision situations. Then, they tackle a significant decision in their own lives through a special project. From his experience in coaching this part of the course, Bob has learned that many young people are facing extremely difficult decisions without the experience to deal with them effectively. Sometimes, they don’t even consider that they have any options at all – they’re just going with the flow.

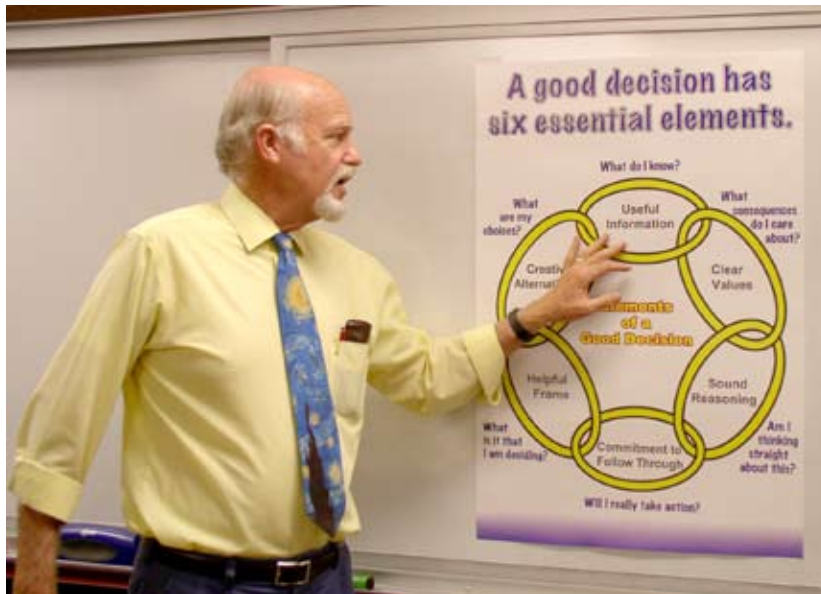
“We never really know the personal environments that our students come out of when they show up each day,” says Bob. “Some of the decisions they face are truly stunning. For example, one student was contemplating running away from home. Another was struggling with whether to make an effort to mend a broken relationship with a parent. It’s essential that we give them a set of powerful tools that can help them face challenges that can sometimes be overwhelming.”

To illustrate the elements of a good decision, Bob uses the analogy of a chain. Students need to ask themselves these six questions (see diagram to the right)

Bob points out to them that a decision is only as strong as the weakest link in the chain.



Better Decisions - Better Lives



STUDENTS LIKE WHAT BOB HASTO OFFER.

“At first I thought the whole idea was dumb,” said one sophomore. “After finishing the project, I am able to see that I have lots of control in my decisions and many alternatives.”

Another student commented, “While participating in this project, I learned that you should never procrastinate in making a decision, because the more you wait, the bigger the problem gets.”

Bob is not your traditional math instructor. Following a longstanding passion, he entered teaching in his mid-50s, after a successful 30-year career in engineering, business and management consulting, plus three terms in the Peace Corps. He has been involved in decision skills training for many years, most recently, as an advisory board member and volunteer with the Decision Education Foundation (DEF), a non-profit organization founded in 2001 to promote, enable and support the development of good decision skills by today's youth.

“I’m able to bring decision power to the kids I teach each year,” he says. “DEF is hoping to bring this missing subject to schools across the country by reaching administrators and teachers with their message. I’m dedicated to this effort, because I know from my program at Foothill High that it really makes a difference.”



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