

# Stories about **LEADERSHIP**

## A STORY ABOUT DECISIVENESS



The advisory board room is too warm. Not unpleasantly so—more the kind of warmth that pretends to be friendly while actually taking your breath away. I know the room. I know the people. I also know the moment when numbers become lives.

The 2026 report lies before me. Revenue forecast: down six percent. Costs: up four percent. The headings are matter-of-fact, the colors muted, but lurking between the lines is a word no one wants to utter: cutbacks.

The CEO sits opposite me, hands folded, gaze calm. He's seen the numbers a thousand times. Today he wants his strategy confirmed.

"We need a decision on site consolidation today," he says. There's no pressure in his voice, but the timing is imperative. "Two options are on the table. We can't go into the new year without clarity."

I nod. Perhaps a little too quickly. I notice it in myself: when I'm shaky inside, I move faster than I want to.

Option A: close two locations, drastic cost reduction, rapid effect.

Option B: close one location, transform a second – investment today, relief tomorrow. Higher risk, but expertise remains.

Two options, both inevitably sad. Both rationally justifiable. And both will affect people who are not sitting in this room.

I think about the visits to the factories. The faces at the factory gate. The woman at reception who always asks if I want another coffee. The head of maintenance who's been here for thirty years and knows every nook and cranny. When you talk about locations, it sounds abstract. When you think about people, it becomes real.

"Katharina," says the CEO, raising his eyebrows slightly. "What is your recommendation?"

There it is, that point where my body wants to lean back for a moment. Not visibly, more internally. Because decisions aren't just about quality. They have consequences. And consequences are uncomfortable when you have to bear them yourself.

I feel that old reflex, which comes across so friendly that one mistakes it for reason: Another expert opinion. Another scenario. Another comparison. Until time decides. Then I can later say, "There was no other way." Then the situation decided, not me.

And then I see that I already know the price: another month of unrest, another month of rumors, another month of grueling waiting. For whom am I deciding if I don't decide? For myself. Not for the company.

A sentence from the coach during a sparring session years ago resurfaces, annoyingly clear: "Decisiveness doesn't mean you have no doubts. It means you don't let them lead you."

I sit up straight. The chair creaks softly. I take a conscious breath.

"I recommend option B," I say.

It's not a bold move. It's more like placing a stone on a table. Heavy enough to be heard.

The CFO immediately flips through the pages. "Option B will increase our costs in 2026. We already have a strained outlook."

"Yes," I say. "In the short term." I keep my gaze on him, not challenging, but calm. "And it massively reduces our strategic risk. If we only cut costs today, we're cutting ourselves into the future. We're losing know-how that we'll later have to buy back at great expense—if we can even find it."

I see the HR director slowly nodding. He's spent the last few weeks calculating the personnel structure. He knows what it means when you take a lawnmower to reorganize responsibilities.

"Option A is more accurately calculated," says the CEO. "Why B?"

I feel a brief tremor on the edge of my self-doubt. I know this man. I know he needs clarity, not poetry. I answer factually – yet maintain consistency at the core of my message.

"Because option B is the only one that is economically and culturally viable," I say. "We don't just have to save next year, but the next five. If we close two locations, we save money quickly, but we lose our strongest process expertise. That will cost us more by 2028 at the latest than we save today."

"This is a bet on the future," murmurs the CFO.

"Yes," I say. "But an informed bet. And frankly, the only one that fits with how we talked in the last values process. Sustainability wasn't just a buzzword. We have to prove ourselves now."

A brief shadow flits across the table. Values are often grand in leadership circles. In decision-making, they diminish. I keep it grand.

The CEO remains silent. He doesn't look at me, but at the paper. Silence is his way of thinking, and sometimes also his way of having someone review something. I endure the pause. I've learned that pauses in such rooms have power – and that one should use them rather than filling them with nervousness.

After maybe ten seconds he says: "And how do we communicate that?"

That's the second part of every decision: it only comes to life when it is spoken.

"With truth," I reply. "Not with euphemisms. We are closing one location. Period. We explain why we are simultaneously investing in the second. And we support those affected fairly. No vocabulary like 'optimization' when we know it's a farewell."

The head of HR nods. The CFO seems unhappy, but no longer combative. The CEO looks at me, and I see something in his expression that I rarely see: respect, not expressed in words, but in a slight, almost imperceptible yielding.

"Okay," he finally says. "Then option B. We'll go ahead with it that way. Katharina, you'll lead communications in Plant 2."

I nod. Part of me feels lighter, another heavier. Decisions are like this: they replace uncertainty with responsibility. And responsibility is rarely comfortable.

Later, as we leave the hall, I jot down notes while walking down the corridor. Keywords for communication. Appointments. Questions that will arise. I feel the fatigue sitting inside me like a stone, but over it lies a clear layer: direction.

I pause briefly in the foyer before getting into the elevator. Outside, people are out carrying bags; the Advent season is clearly visible in the city. In here, Advent is just a number on the calendar.

I think decisiveness is not a heroic feeling. It is the willingness to choose the uncomfortable option if it is the right one, and then to stand by it.

When I stand at the factory tomorrow, some will be angry. Some will be sad. Some will look at me as if it were my fault. Perhaps I will even ask myself if it's true.

But I will no longer ask whether I should have waited longer.

# Takeaway inspiration

## Decisiveness

Decisiveness doesn't mean acting without doubt, but rather choosing a viable path despite incomplete certainty and visibly advocating for it. Good decisions accept short-term pain in order to secure long-term responsibility and direction.

Make a decision today that you've been putting off for weeks, and visibly commit to taking the next step. You don't have to be certain—but you do need the courage to stop living in "maybes."

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS ABOUT DECISIVENESS FOR YOU

1. What decision am I currently postponing so that time will decide for me?
2. What do I want to avoid – guilt, conflict, unpopularity?
3. Which option is the right one in the long run, even if it hurts in the short term?



Feel free to contact me anytime::

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