The Southern Legislative Conference (SLC) of The Council of State Governments completed its fourth annual Center for the Advancement of Leadership Skills (CALS), on September 25-29. The 2010 CALS program partners were the Winthrop Rockefeller Institute and the Clinton School of Public Service of the University of Arkansas System, that also served as the inaugural CALS host of 2007.

The 2010 class comprised 22 emerging leaders from the legislative, executive and judicial branches of state government from Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Missouri, Mississippi, North Carolina, and Oklahoma.

During the intensive three and a half day program, participants spent classroom time with nationally renowned experts in the fields of communication, media and leadership training. The program curriculum is designed to help participants enhance their leadership capabilities, professional careers, and personal lives through improvement in communication, conflict resolution, consensus building and critical decision-making skills. Through the CALS program, the enhancement of these leadership competencies prepares rising and mid-career officials to be effective leaders in state government. Another tenet of this premier multi-branch program is that it offers a unique forum for state officials who might rarely cross paths to share ideas.

Representative Lee Denney of Oklahoma said, “CALS was one of—if not the best—conferences I’ve ever attended. It was so good to interact with other legislators and judges from around the region.”

Unique among CSG leadership programs, CALS rotates among sponsoring universities in the Southern region. The 2011 program is set for September 24-28 and will be co-sponsored by Coastal Carolina University. Planning for the 2012 program also is underway, and Georgia State University in Atlanta, Georgia, was selected as the university partner.

Past university partners of the CALS program include the University of Arkansas System (2007 and 2010), University of Oklahoma (2008) and West Virginia University (2009).
A former partner at PriceWaterhouseCoopers and IBM Global Business Services, Speaker-designate Tillis left IBM in 2009 to focus his attention on serving in the General Assembly and to lead the 2010 House Republican Caucus Campaign Committee. He plans on using his organizational skills and his legislative experience to lead as Speaker. His experience in management consulting gives him a deep understanding of fiscal management, policy making, and transformation of complex organizations.

Speaker-designate Tillis has a demonstrated ability to work across the aisle to pass important legislation. During the 2010 legislative session, he was the primary sponsor of 15 enacted bills, including legislation to provide for energy efficient state motor vehicles as well as requiring DNA samples be collected upon arrest for certain offenses.

As Speaker, he will have the task of appointing committee chairs, selecting members of various state boards, and shaping the entire legislative agenda. After the census, he also will tackle legislative and congressional redistricting.

Representative-elect Tim Scott, 2008 CALS Alumni, has joined the ranks of other state legislators who have transitioned from state-level lawmakers to members of the United States Congress.

Representative-elect Scott defeated a formidable opponent to win the Republican nomination for South Carolina’s 1st Congressional district. On November 2, he became the first black Republican from the Deep South elected to Congress since the 1800s.

He recently flew to Washington, before most of his future House freshman colleagues, to help usher in the largest class of new GOP lawmakers in several years. Representative-elect Scott and three other recently elected first-term representatives were named to a 22-member transition team that will construct the rules by which the House will operate under a Republican majority. He will replace the retiring GOP Representative Henry Brown.

Representative Scott, 44, was first elected to the Charleston County Council in 1995 and served 13 years in county government. Professionally, he is a successful business executive as owner of Tim Scott Allstate and a partner of Pathway Real Estate Group, LLC.

Representative Scott credits his belief system and success to his mother and youth mentor. According to Representative Scott, they taught him the importance of structure and discipline. When asked about the CALS program, Representative Scott stated that the CALS program was “absolutely impactful.” In his words, the program was “inspirational, motivational and educational.”
Alumni Accolades

Class of 2007 - University of Arkansas System

Congressman Brett Guthrie (Kentucky) was reelected to the 2nd District congressional seat. He was first elected in 2008. Before serving in Congress, Guthrie was a member of the Kentucky Senate.

Representative Marcelo Llorente (Florida) announced he will be running for mayor of Miami-Dade in 2012. Elected in 2002, Representative Llorente is currently representing district 116.

Representative Ric Killian (North Carolina), a Lieutenant Colonel in the United States Army Reserves, returned from a seven month voluntary tour-of-duty in Iraq. On April 4, 2010, he was featured in an article in the Charlotte NewsObserver.

In addition to serving as Majority Whip for the past two years, Representative Kathy Webb (Arkansas) was appointed co-chair of the Governor’s Working Group on Corrections and Sentencing. She also co-chaired the Governor’s Commission on Global Warming and served as co-chair of the Sustainable Building and Design Task Force.

Class of 2008 - University of Oklahoma

Mr. Frank Scott (Arkansas) was named deputy director of policy for Governor Mike Beebe. He is responsible for the development, organization and implementation of Governor Beebe’s legislative agenda. He also advises the governor on broadband, healthcare, health information technology, human services, economic development, workforce development and budget and personnel policies. Mr. Scott also was the lead policy advisor in the development of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Health Information Technology (HIT) grant application. The grant was fully funded at $7.9 million.

Class of 2009 - West Virginia University

Representative Joan Brady (South Carolina) was appointed chair of the Insurance Subcommittee of the Labor, Commerce and Industry Committee for the 2009-2010 session. In addition to serving as Majority Whip, Representative Brady is also the vice chair of the Joint Citizens and Legislative Committee on Children and the screening committee to appoint trustees to state universities and colleges. She is the co-chair of The Council of State Governments’ Annual Meeting Committee. Representative Brady was recently inducted to the national board of Women in Government; she will serve a two-year term as the Southern regional director.

Senator Mark Herring (Virginia) was honored by the Biotechnology Industry Organization as State Legislator of the Year for 2009-2010. He sponsored, and the General Assembly passed, the Science and Technology Research Development and Commercialization Act, to encourage research, development, and commercialization of advancements in science and technology in the Commonwealth; and the Virginia Innovation Investment Act, which offered targeted, long-term capital gains tax exclusion for Virginia bioscience investments.
Getting into the Decision Game
by Michael Useem

To launch or delay? Fire or hire, take a promotion or let it be? A marriage counselor or a divorce lawyer? How about surgery or what physicians call "watchful waiting"? Decisions come in all shapes and sizes, with every sort of consequence in between. Some decisions are fleeting, the difference between a social grace and a faux pas. Others are fearsome, keeping us restless and awake for hours. At the extreme, they can become what F. Scott Fitzgerald described in The Crack-Up as the "real dark night of the soul" when "it is always three o’clock in the morning, day after day."

At work, at home, in the community, we make decisions all the time, a constant barrage of them. Or we fail to make them, put off to tomorrow, let things slide, opt out of the game. Some decisions are as trivial as ordering whole wheat or rye, while others are as consequential as standing in silence or blowing the whistle when witness to company malfeasance.

The exercise of tough choices might be one of the most universal of all experiences. In a national survey taken in 2000, four out of five respondents said decision making was very important in their current or most recent job. What’s more, the capacity to make choices—the willingness to jump into the decision game and play it well—is arguably one of the great discriminators and predictors of ultimate success or failure. “Managers at every level,” warned former General Electric chief executive Jack Welch, have to be ready to make many “hard decisions.” Those who can do so rise high; those who cannot manage it tread water or sink.

Gustavus Who?

We have all known the fortunate few for whom decisions seem effortless. They glide through one judgment call after another, flummoxed by none, content with most, never breaking a sweat. Ernest Hemingway called it grace under pressure. We have also known the opposite, the equivocators who cannot get off the fence, the contemplators who consider a choice from every angle, the freezers who simply lock up at a consequential moment.

More than 135 years after his death, Robert E. Lee has some fifty public schools across the South named after him. Gustavus Woodson Smith has none; indeed, his name is virtually unknown outside a small circle of Civil War buffs and historians. Yet on May 31, 1862, with the Union Army under George McClellan's marching on Richmond's gates and threatening to make short work of the new Confederacy, it was Smith, not Lee, to whom Confederate president Jefferson Davis turned.

So alarmed was Davis by the 125,000-man enemy force advancing on his capital that he had ridden out to the front lines that day to consult with Joseph E. Johns, the general in charge of Richmond's defense. Davis had almost reached his general when shrapnel and a bullet knocked Johnston from his horse and took him out of action. With that, Davis extended a battlefield promotion to Johnston's ranking subordinate, the forty-year-old Gustavus W. Smith, and handed over to him the defense of Richmond and, by extension, the fate of the Confederacy.

There was no question of Smith's pedigree. Born in Kentucky and educated at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, he graduated eighth in the Class of 1842, a group that included such future Civil War luminaries as Abner Doubleday and James Longstreet. Nor was there any question of Smith's personal bravery or military acumen. Like Jefferson Davis, he had fought with distinction in the Mexican-American War in 1846–1847 and served briefly on the faculty of West Point before involving himself in New York City politics. He had a blustery style, one that seemed to suggest that this was a general not easily fazed. Yet when Davis summoned him to greatness, Smith shrank from the task.

At a meeting with Davis and his military aide, Robert E. Lee, at 8:30 p.m. on May 31, Smith appeared at a loss. When Davis pressed him for his plans for the defense of Richmond, the newly appointed commander of the Army of Northern Virginia responded by asking his president what he knew about the day's battle. Smith confessed that he “could not determine” without more information “what was best to be done.” The next day, after his army had achieved little on the battlefield, Smith took ill and appeared on the verge of a nervous breakdown. No question of “personal courage could be raised by anyone who had seen him battle,” observed one historian, but “responsibility it was that shattered his nerves.” At 2 p.m. on June 1, 1862, Jefferson Davis relieved Smith of his command and gave the assignment to Lee.

Decidophobia

Handed a momentous assignment at a critical juncture in the greatest crisis of the American experiment, Gustavus Smith served as commander of the Army of Northern Virginia for less than twenty-four hours. Robert E. Lee, by contrast, would turn McClellan back from the gates of Richmond and subsequently lead the South’s biggest army brilliantly through the epic battles at Antietam, Chancellorsville, and Fredericksburg until he reached his own mistaken go point at Gettysburg. For Lee, major decisions came readily, but for Smith they did not. When faced with consequential decisions, most people would prefer to be more like Lee than Smith, but the reality for many can be just the opposite.

So many individuals are so averse to making decisions, especially when they impact so many others, that clinical psychologists have even come up with a name for it—or rather two names for two related conditions: decidophobia and its close cousin hypengyophobia, an abnormal and persistent fear of responsibility. Save for the most natural of decision makers, most people have edged up against those clinical conditions at one time or another. Almost all have experienced that sinking feeling when a particularly vexing decision is finally reached after days or even months of circling the issue.

For most, the natural business of making choices is hardly natural at all. But then again neither is speaking Arabic, designing airframes, or playing the tuba. All are learned skills, mastered through observation and practice, and honed by experience. So it is with decision making, too.

About the Author

Michael Useem is professor of management and director of the Center for Leadership and Change at the Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania, and is author of The Go Point: When It’s Time to Decide (Random House/Crown Business, 2006) from which this article is derived.