

KIRBY CONSULTING

Risk Assessment Framework

A practical tool for leaders who want to make better decisions, faster.

Developed by Shelby Kirby | kirbyconsulting.net

WHY THIS FRAMEWORK EXISTS

Early in my career, a supervisor told me something I've never forgotten: *'Every decision has a trade-off or a potential risk associated with it. It's up to you as a leader to understand the severity of that risk.'*

That one conversation changed how I lead — and it's the reason I created this framework. Risk isn't something to avoid. It's something to understand. The leaders who get promoted, who build things that last, who earn the trust of their teams — they're the ones who know how to think before they move.

Use this framework before any significant decision. It takes five minutes. It will save you hours of cleanup.

STEP 1 — ASK THESE THREE QUESTIONS FIRST

Before you do anything else, run every decision through these three questions:

1

What's the worst realistic outcome if this goes wrong?

If the answer is minor and recoverable — move forward. If the answer has real consequences for people, budget, or reputation — slow down and consult before acting.

2

Who needs to know about this, and when?

Not everyone needs to be in the room before a decision is made — but some people absolutely do. Knowing the difference is half the battle. Think about who is impacted, who has authority, and who will be accountable for the outcome.

3

Am I consulting or informing — and which does this situation call for?

Consult when the stakes are high or the decision significantly affects others. Inform when the risk is low and speed matters more than consensus. Knowing the difference will accelerate your career.

STEP 2 — SCORE YOUR RISK LEVEL

Rate each factor below from 1 (low) to 3 (high). Add up your score to determine how to proceed.

| FACTOR | 1 — Low | 2 — Medium | 3 — High |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Impact on people | Affects only you | Affects your immediate team | Affects the broader org or clients |
| Financial implications | No budget impact | Minor budget impact | Significant budget at stake |
| Reputational risk | Internal only, contained | Could affect team perception | Could affect client or public trust |
| Reversibility | Easily undone | Difficult but possible to reverse | Cannot be undone |
| Time sensitivity | Plenty of time to consult | Some urgency, but manageable | Urgent — decision needed now |

STEP 3 — WHAT YOUR SCORE MEANS

| TOTAL SCORE | RISK LEVEL | WHAT TO DO |
|-------------|-------------|--|
| 5 — 7 | Low Risk | Make the decision. Inform the relevant people after the fact. Move quickly. |
| 8 — 11 | Medium Risk | Pause before deciding. Consult one or two key stakeholders. Document your reasoning. |
| 12 — 15 | High Risk | Do not decide alone. Bring in leadership, gather input, and align before moving forward. |

QUICK REFERENCE — CONSULT VS. INFORM

CONSULT FIRST WHEN...

- The decision affects budget or headcount
- It could significantly impact a client relationship
- It sets a precedent or changes a process
- It involves a public-facing action or communication
- You're unsure — when in doubt, consult

INFORM AFTER WHEN...

- The decision is low-stakes and easily reversible
- Speed matters more than consensus
- It falls clearly within your scope and authority
- Delaying would cause more problems than acting
- You've already consulted on similar decisions before

A NOTE FROM SHELBY

This framework isn't about slowing you down — it's about giving you confidence. The leaders I admire most aren't the ones who never make mistakes. They're the ones who know how to think before they move, own the outcome either way, and keep getting better.

Everything is figure-out-able. You just have to be willing to do the work.

— **Shelby Kirby, Founder of Kirby Consulting**

Want to talk through a decision? Let's connect.

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