Making decisions

1 When was the last time you were faced with a difficult decision and were unable to make up your mind? How did you decide in the end, or was the decision made for you?

2 You may be a cool-headed decision maker in the office, but would you know what to do in a real life-or-death situation? Read the following extract from an unusual website and discuss the questions.

The principle behind this site is a simple one: you just never know.
You never really know what nasty surprises life has in store for you – what is lurking around the corner, what is hovering over your head, what is swimming beneath the surface. You never know when you might be called on to perform an act of extreme bravery and to choose life or death by your own actions.

But when you are called, we want to be sure that you know how to react. We want you to know what to do when the pilot passes out and you have to land the plane. We want you to know what to do when you see that shark fin heading toward you …

www.worstcasescenarios.com

1 On a driving holiday in India you lose control of your hire-car travelling downhill at 70 mph on a mountain road. You’ve no brakes and there’s a 300m drop to the valley below. Do you:
   a try to jump out of the car and roll to safety?
   b steer away from the cliff edge and into the mountainside to stop the car?
   c steer into the crash barriers on the cliff edge to slow the car down?

2 On a trek in the Chilean Andes you get cut off from the rest of your group and become hopelessly lost. As you try to work out which direction to take, you are confronted by a hungry mountain lion. Do you:
   a lie down and play dead?
   b shout and flap your coat at the animal?
   c run and hide (maybe find a tree to climb)?
3. During a flight over the Grand Canyon in a private plane, your pilot passes out and you have to land the plane yourself. You manage to reach the airfield. Do you:
   a. keep the nose of the plane pointing above the horizon as you descend to the runway?
   b. slow down to about 60 mph as you touch down and then hit the brakes hard?
   c. keep the plane at a steady altitude of 150 feet as you approach the beginning of the runway?

4. Work with a partner from the other group. Briefly summarize the scenarios you faced and the decisions you took.

5. Now listen to some advice on how to survive the eight worst-case scenarios in 3. How many lives did you lose? Which group did better?

6. Put the following expressions on the scale below according to how likely they are. Most of them were in the advice you just listened to. The first one has been done for you.

   a. You've a good chance.
   b. You don't stand a chance.
   c. There's a 50-50 chance.
   d. Your chances are slim.
   e. You're in with a chance.
   f. The chances are remote.
   g. You've blown your chances.
   h. There's a fair chance.
   i. There's an outside chance.
   j. It's a million-to-one chance.
   k. No chance!

   more likely  possible  less likely

7. Complete expressions a–n using the nouns and verbs in the boxes. They were all in the advice in 5.

   bet    circumstances    idea    mistake    move    point    thing

   a. Your best ________ is to shout and flap your coat at the animal.
   b. Do not in any ________ try to stand up on the ice.
   c. It's a good ________ to brake as soon as you've gained control of the steering.
   d. There's not much ________ trying to force the door open.
   e. By far the most sensible ________ to do is to open the car window.
   f. Just grabbing on to the nearest person with a parachute is not a smart ________
   g. It's a common ________ to think the shark's nose is the best area to target.
Don’t even __________ about jumping from a moving vehicle.
the temptation to run from a mountain lion.
any ideas of playing dead out of your mind.
sure that the nose of the plane is six inches below the horizon.
care to land on your back to avoid breaking it.
about trapping air inside a sinking car.
much better to strike at the eyes or gills.

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8 Work with a partner. Practise using some of the expressions in 6 and 7 by advising
them on how to handle one of the following situations. Don’t worry if you can’t give
expert advice!

**Worst-case scenarios**
- on a round-the-world cruise the ocean liner you’re on
  hits an iceberg and starts to sink
- during a trip across the Australian Outback, your car
  breaks down in the middle of nowhere
- a poisonous snake has crawled into your sleeping bag

**Workplace dilemmas**
- your boss is working you to death
- a colleague is taking the credit for all your ideas
- you’ve been passed over for promotion – again!
- there’s a rumour your company is about to announce
  redundancies

The decision-making process
1 Read the anecdote about Alfred P. Sloan, the man who built General Motors into the
biggest company in the world. What point is being made about group decisions?

2 2.30–2.32 Listen to extracts from three different decision-making meetings and
answer the questions.

1 **An industrial dispute**
a Why is Dan so concerned about a strike?
b Who’s the calmest person at the meeting?

2 **Political instabilities**
a What’s Hans’s objection to the proposal?
b What’s Andrea worried about?

3 **A product recall**
a Whose side is Laura on?
b Do you think Simon has already made up his mind?

3 You heard the following idiomatic expressions in 2. Can you remember the missing
words? The first two letters are given. The meaning of the idioms in brackets may help
you.

a the ball is in their co__________ (we’re waiting for someone else to make a decision)
b jump to co__________ (decide too quickly without considering all the facts)
c when it comes to the cr__________ (when a decision finally has to be made)
d sit on the fe__________ (refuse to support either side in an argument)