Sarah Robb O'Hagan at Gatorade

Gatorade sales had been slipping because the company had lost its strategy. It became absorbed by the other PepsiCo products and was turned into just another drink on the shelf. Sarah Robb O'Hagan became aware of this and used her experience with Nike to begin to transform the company. This decision appeared to be made instinctually rather than as a result of a rational approach. In fact, Robb O'Hagan's decision was completely irrational and went against the accepted norms of the company. She knew her decision would be a major risk for the company to undertake but she bravely presented it to her superiors knowing that it was the right way to go.

It has been suggested that a three-step process exists that good decision makers employ when faced with ambiguous and uncertain problems. The first phase is decision making which includes making timely decisions whether they are good or bad. The second phase is sense-making which is the analysis and diagnosis of the situation and the impact that decisions have made on it. The third phase is adapting which is putting sense-making to good use by adjusting decisions to try to ensure a positive outcome. Throughout this process a good decision maker uses his or her experience and expertise to lead them through (Klein 6). I believe that Robb O'Hagan went through this three-step process as she made her decision in the redefinition of Gatorade. Robb O'Hagan entered Gatorade at a time where a series of decisions had been made which led the company down a path of confused branding and mismanaged marketing. While on maternity leave, Robb O'Hagan analyzed and diagnosed Gatorade's situation. She discovered that 46% of total sales were coming from only 22% of the demographic which consisted of high school athletes and marathon runners. Moving on to phase three of the Klein's decision making process, she decided to move the product into a different direction: she would essentially ignore the smaller demographic, and cater wholly to the diehard Gatorade consumers. For the high school athletes, she decided to push Gatorade to the coaches of young players and promote the product heavily through summer camps and tournaments. It was decided that marketing would change drastically as well. The product is now heavily digitally marketed and the development of a revolutionary new online software system is underway which hopes to attract athletes of all levels to increase their performance and compete against other users. For the marathon runners, she decided to have Gatorade support local training groups. She also clarified the product line and introduced a system of energy enhancing consumables for athletes before, during, and after competition. The final adaptation in her Gatorade game plan includes transforming the company into a "hub of fitness knowledge" (Feifer 2). She's deciding to take the product beyond drinks and energy snacks and open a sports science institute to help serious athletes improve their physical prowess. It's a very expensive gamble, but if she can get the attention of just a handful of serious athletes and prove that they can gain a competitive edge, this could be huge for the company.

Since Robb O'Hagan brought her decision-making skills to Gatorade, the company has been on the rebound. Through the expertise she gained at Nike, careful analysis, adaptation, and intuitive decision-making, Sarah Robb O'Hagan has successfully transformed a failing soft drink producer into a respected and serious force of athletic improvement.