



BetterBalance Coaching Archived Monthly Tips

Making Better Decisions



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Better Decisions

How is that as sophisticated and intelligent thinkers we can still manage to go through life making some poor decisions? How often do you look back in hindsight and regret a choice you made, an action you took or words you said? Do you ever catch yourself saying “I don’t know why I did that”? or “I wish I had done that differently” or even “I don’t believe I’ve just agreed to that”. Working as a professional coach I’ve noticed how the decisions people most regret are often when they didn’t trust their gut instincts and chose to override their intuition. For some reason when our gut instinct seems to be telling us one thing our logical intelligence may persuade us that it should be something different. We go with what seems logical only to look back in hindsight and wish we had followed our intuition. Do you tend to trust your intuitive gut instincts or do you go another way? Which on balance serves you best? Last month’s tip (The HAPNAV) is now posted on my web site and offers an excellent tool to help make choices that better honour our values. This month I am offering you a simple decision making strategy that will help you to get a better balance between your intuition and your more ‘conscious’ logical thinking.

To achieve this it can help to take better account of four key factors that are often overlooked in our decision making. These involve the balancing act that takes place between **approval** and **fulfilment** combined with **risk** versus **safety**.

Here is a real example to illustrate what this balancing act can be like. Sally (pseudonym) is a talented musician and wants to study music then make this her career. Her parents while supporting Sally completely in her music as a hobby have quite different ideas about what they think she should follow as a career and think she should study Law. Sally is therefore facing a decision that involves the balance between her future **fulfilment** or keeping the **approval** of her parents. She knows that choosing music would express her talents and give her fulfilment but as a consequence this choice may cost her the approval and support of her parents which may in turn mean not having financial assistance through college. This is neither an easy nor straightforward career decision which illustrates the difficulty of getting the balance between the two factors. Equally sometimes in relationships we can find our own fulfilment is on collision course with partners. It can appear that being selfish in searching for our own fulfilment is not looking after the interests of people close to us. You might choose to argue that in fact looking after your own fulfilment and happiness is the best possible way of serving others around you and also creating a model for others to follow! I wonder what Sally will do?

Where do you tend to sit on this decision making line between **approval** at one end and **fulfilment** at the other? Do you get the right balance for you? What kind of words come into your head when making decisions? Do you find yourself saying “I should do this” or “I must do that”, or do you find yourself saying “I want to”? ‘Shoulds’ and ‘Musts’ are often called pressure words which are frequently associated with feeling the need to gain others approval. Over time we can get into habits that no longer serve us well in the way we make decisions. One way of weighing up your best position on this line is to consider the consequences of making a decision based on placing approval over fulfilment and compare this with the consequences of placing fulfilment over approval. Your intuition will often guide you to take more account of your own fulfilment so notice more what



your intuition is telling you and also how it is telling you. The expression 'gut reaction' literally comes from the fact that many of us get a feeling in our guts/stomach that lets us know when something is wrong or right for us! What does right or wrong feel like for you?

Next is an example that puts **safety** versus **risk** into the equation to explore a further dimension of decision making. Pete is considering asking his boss for promotion but concerned about how that might be perceived by his employer. He thinks that the safest thing to do is 'not rock the boat' although the consequences probably mean staying in the same position and not progressing his career or earnings. Pete thinks the riskier option is asking for promotion because his boss may label him as a nuisance who is acting above his station. On the other hand if he doesn't take the risk he may never get what he wants without asking. Where do you tend to sit on this line, do you play too safe, take too many risks or get it about right?

In the two examples there are neither easy answers nor predictable outcomes and life is often like that. What you can do in these situations is to explore the four factors fully then trust your intuition to make the best possible decision for you at the time. Here is a **Six Step** way to do this:

Step One. Take the issue in question and write down the possible decisions or options. For sake of example let's say there are three possible decisions.

Step Two. Draw one line and write the word approval at one end and fulfilment at the other. Draw a second line and write the word safety at one end and risk at the other.

Step Three. Consider your three possible decisions/options and make a mark where each one fits on each line. For example in Sally's case the possible decision to study music full time would be marked close to the fulfilment end of her line and the decision to study Law close to the approval end. Pete would probably mark the possible decision of not asking for promotion closer to the safety end of his line.

Step Four. With the three possible decisions/options marked off on both lines next notice some of the consequences that may come into play for each of the choices. For example if Sally chose not to study music a positive consequence would be that her parents may support her financially through college for Law and she wouldn't get in debt. Equally a negative consequence may be that she was unhappy.

Step Five. Ask yourself some searching questions such as "What does seeking approval gain for me?" "What does playing safe get for me?" "What may happen if I go for more?" "Do I take enough risks or do I take too many?" "What will my future be like without fulfilment?" "How can I still go for more and also minimise the risk?" "If my fulfilment appears to be on collision course with others how can I resolve this?"

Step Six. Finally looking at the whole picture notice which of the possible decisions/options you are most drawn to? What decision would feel right and have the best balance? You could also sleep on it and let your subconscious do the rest.



The above six steps are more appropriate for bigger decisions, for more day to day decisions requiring more instant answers you can simply ask yourself the following two questions then go with what feels right.

Question One. "Am I doing this to get approval or for my own fulfilment?"

Question Two. "Am I playing too safe or could I go for more of what I want?"

Gaining a deeper understanding of how these four decision making factors come into play in your life will help you to express your intuitive side more often and ultimately trust your gut instincts to get a better balance between approval and fulfilment and risk versus safety – getting it right more often for YOU! In organisations notice where the 'culture' fits with these four factors. I have seen successful businesses stifled in their decision making by managers jostling for approval and other businesses not reaching their potential because they have got into the habit of playing safe!

If you've enjoyed this tip and found it useful then you can receive regular monthly tips and ideas for free by entering your name and email into the monthly tips box on this web site.

Best wishes

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