

## Making a decision: How hard can it be?

***It's not hard to make decisions when you know what your values are. - Roy Disney***

Have you ever stopped to consider how many decisions you make everyday? From the moment you wake up you are making decisions. You may be deciding when to get up, what to wear, what to eat, when to leave the house, which way to get to work. You probably don't even realise how many decisions you are actually making. This is because many of your decisions are made outside of conscious awareness.

There are some decisions that are not so simple to make. You may find yourself hashing and re-hashing the decision considering every possible consequence before getting to the point where you absolutely have to make that decision.

Being in this state of indecision can be frustrating, tiring, annoying and/or emotional depending on the decision at hand. This happens in our personal lives and our professional lives.



So given you make thousands of decisions a day, what is it that stops you in your tracks rendering you helpless with one decision when you make other decisions so easily? You'll be glad to hear there is an explanation. It comes down to your values system.

We all have an internal values system. We developed our core values over the course of our lives. When we make a decision we are doing an internal check of the result of that decision against our value system. If a decision meets with our values for that particular area of our life, then that decision is easy for us.

The decisions that are not easy to make are the ones that are not in alignment with our core values. When a decision is not in line with our core values it means that we find ourselves having to compromise on one or more of our values in order to make that decision. As human being this can be an uncomfortable feeling, having to compromise on the things that we hold closest to our hearts and that create our meaning.

***Some persons are very decisive when it comes to avoiding decisions. ~Brendan Francis***

This assessment of whether or not we can actually go against what we hold dear to our hearts is very difficult and can cause us to stand still for periods of time. This standing still and taking no action occurs until the negative impact of not making the decision outweighs the discomfort of making a compromise on our values.

So what can you do if you are in this situation and you want to find it easier to make that important decision? To illustrate this it will help to use an example.

Consider Susan, a lawyer for a firm in the US. Susan has only just started practicing as a lawyer and she went into the industry because she wanted justice to prevail and she wanted to ensure that the legal system was upheld for the well being of the community at large.

She is working on a case where her client has been accused of theft. She believes her client to be innocent and argues his case convincingly. During the case she discovers that her client did in fact commit the crime.

When we elicited Susan's core values for her career they were as follows:

*Susan says she values the following about her career as a lawyer:*

- *Enabling justice to be upheld*
- *Feeling she is doing a good deed*
- *Enabled her to have status in society*
- *Earning good money*
- *Intellectually stimulating*
- *Helping people*
- *Making a difference to the world*

Susan is trying to make a decision on whether to continue to represent her client or to pass her client over to one of her colleagues. Given her core values above, can you see how she may find herself struggling to make this decision?

To elaborate, we can see that Susan values *justice* and now she finds that she is representing a client who she knows is in the wrong. How do you think she feels now about representing him and about her career as a lawyer? She values being able to *make a difference* to the world and she may be left feeling she is not making a positive difference to the world by representing her client who she knows committed a crime. These are two possible conflicts Susan may be experiencing.

***Indecision becomes decision with time. ~Author Unknown***

Consider the following; Susan goes and talks to her colleagues about this situation. One says she should leave the case whilst another says that if she has committed to the client she should follow it through.



What is happening in this instance? Susan's colleagues are hearing her problem and then running it through their own set of personal core values to arrive at the advice they are giving her. It is no wonder then that Susan finds some people's advice better than others. She will most likely lean towards the advice of those colleagues who have values similar to hers as this is more

comfortable. Consciously she is unaware that she shares similar values with some colleagues. She just unconsciously feels these people understand her better.

Now regardless of what you believe Susan should do, all of us can relate to having to compromise on values that we hold close to our hearts. So what can you do if you find yourself in a bind and need to make a decision?

The first step is to understand where the problem lies. We recommend you write down a list of what you value in the particular area of your life in question. If it is a career decision ask;

***What do I value about my career as an X?***

The next step is to come up with a hierarchy of those values. Doing this encourages us to address which are your most treasured values. Done properly you will arrive at a values hierarchy which should feel correct for you and make sense with respect to how you see the world.

The next step is to determine what each of those values really means to you. For example, if Susan's highest value in the hierarchy was 'helping people' then we need to discover what is important to her about helping people.

Let's say that when we asked Susan what was important about helping people she replied:

***"Not letting them down"***

Immediately we can see why she is at a standstill with her decision on whether or not to continue with her client. If she leaves the case she will be letting her client down and in her world, this is her most treasured value.

Consider for a moment how easily Susan could make that decision of whether to stay and continue to represent her client if she was to gain an understanding for her of when the right times were to 'not let people down' and when it was ok to let people down.

If she was then to create some markers around her value of 'helping people' she would find it a lot easier to make the decision at hand. This is just one example of how our values can both guide us and limit our ability to move forward.

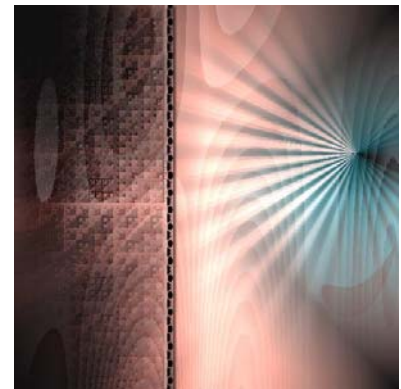
*Susan's example was just a hypothetical example to illustrate values, their hierarchy and the meaning they create for us.*

Most times we are not even aware of our values or why they are the way they are. Our values are unconscious until we bring them into conscious awareness.

So for those of you who want to be able to make a decision we recommend:

- Write down your core values for that area of your life.
- Create a hierarchy of your core values
- Understand what is important to you about those values.

Doing this will help you work out the answers to your bigger decisions in light of understanding what is truly important to you.



Within a coaching situation a good coach will explore a client's values and their meaning. Any change work (which is just a description of the process of changes that a coach facilitates in partnership with the client) that takes place with people should always be in complete alignment with the client's value system and not the coaches. This ensures that change work is lasting and congruent for the client.

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If you want to see the true power of values, you may find it interesting to explore what different people value in certain areas of life. People's values tell you a lot about them and how they shape their world and create their meaning.

Values questions also make good interview questions to help determine what candidates are good at and what they are not suited to. For example someone who has a core value of *being*

*accepted* is going to be less likely to be a strong decision maker.

Someone with the value in their career of *being accepted* will find making a decision difficult because making a decision can mean not pleasing everyone, hence the risk not having acceptance.

In contrast someone who has a career value of *being recognised* may not necessarily always be the greatest team player.

Someone who values *order* will be good in a project type role or one that requires process work.

When we understand people's values and how they make meaning of the world we can go a lot further to understanding human motivation, how to give effective feedback, how to develop constructive appraisal systems and any other area where we are required to be able to understand humans and human potential.

***Everything is something you decide to do, and there is nothing you have to do. - Denis Waitley***



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