

Decisions, Choices and Temperament[©]

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Abstract

Almost everyone has a sense of achievement. To make the necessary changes, decisions have to be made between a range of choices. Only by making the right decisions can a person achieve. This article will look at decision making.

You have a Choice

If you have a choice, you are fortunate. Some people don't, they are stuck. It may be the king in his palace or a beggar in a hovel. Most people want to change from where they are to where they think they want to be. They have to make decisions and that is never easy. Life is a game of snakes and ladders. You can go down as well as up and sliding down is faster than rising up. I like the comment of a comedian, which may have been true, "I've tried rich and I've tried poor and I prefer rich." No one disagrees.

Decisions Make Themselves

My general rule is that decisions make themselves. If you are struggling to come to a decision, stop and reflect. A decision depends on supporting facts coupled to the gut feeling of doing the right thing. If that does not come together in a warm glow, there is something vital missing and your sub-conscious is telling you to beware. You need more facts.

Decision making happens many times in an ordinary day. Usually, they are automatic decisions based on previous, tested actions. You may be negotiating traffic, steering between cars, ears and eyes alert to dangers. A strenuous task for a new comer but relaxing to an expert. I can handle a busy street in Britain but in India it is to me, mayhem. The rules are different. In Britain there can be a

build-up of anger. In India, with many more vehicles, rickshaws and bicycles it has to be friendlier. Anything else does not work. That general understanding allows traffic flow. However, there is a Biggest is Right rule. The biggest is usually a lorry, a huge thing in multi-colours and battered. It stops for no one. Buses are almost as big and force their way through by blasts of the horn. Cyclists swerve on to the gravel at the side of the road and smile dodging death by a fraction of a second. They made decisions which a European would not have made and ended up beneath the wheels of the juggernaut. I would have shouted at the lorry driver. He does not care about a cyclist. It is all a matter of knowing what is going on. If you don't know, don't go.

In Harrod's food hall, one of the world's most exclusive shops in London, I watched shoppers examining the produce, gasp at the prices and ponder at the exotic items displayed. In came a man in a hurry, grabbed a basket and went to the shelves without hesitation, loading it with the most expensive items available. He swiped his card at the checkout and was away. I then realised that he would be the butler or chef for one of the many big houses in this part of west London and what he was buying he would buy every day. It was not his money he was spending. He was in a different world to everyone else, the world for which Harrods caters. His decision making was automatic but not mindless. At the end of the line would be a rich person for whom decisions are the regular diet. Even for those fortunate to inherit wealth, to keep their money is

almost as difficult as making money. For the butler, it was just another day. For his boss, no two days would be the same. The butler is part of the furniture. Phone calls and visitors cause change and decisions have to be made. The challenge is stimulating and success breeds success.

Career Decisions

I am prompted to write this article by students asking what they should do after school and university. For most of them, there is no obvious answer. They are too young to know themselves so do not even know what questions to ask about the courses and careers. The only thing they can do is be flexible. The missing information is more on their own side than at university or with an employer. Are you adventurous or prefer a regulated job with set hours? Only by making a few mistakes do you get a feel for what you like. These mistakes must not be seen as failures. They are exploratory and necessary. A student does not always inherit their parents' temperament so it does not follow that they will want what their parents advise.

An even more unpredictable issue is the boyfriend – girlfriend relationship which carries with it more than enough distractions to divert the best students from their studies. All of us have an inbuilt eye for others according to data which we shall later discover mattered less than what was subsequently discovered about that other lovable/horrible person. My only advice is to pass the blame and say we all suffer a design fault. There are countless computer programmes for match making to take the decision making out of selection; the algorithms do it for you providing you answer the questions honestly. And there you have the problem; do you have the information about yourself? If you do, for how long will you remain that sort of person? Are you changing over the years? Of course, you are and only by tolerance will you accept the results of a less than perfect decision. If the situation becomes intolerable, a bombardment of decisions will erupt demanding resolutions and the situation can become worse with rash moves rather than steady adjustment.

Money

After relationships, the other troublesome area is money, usually spending rather than earning. For most of us, we shall try to earn as much as we can, honestly. Having got it, or sometimes before, how to spend it is a glorious prospect of reality or fantasy. It has to be reality so think hard. There is a lot out there to tempt you away from safety. They are called lenders. You have at last got a

job. Money is flowing in. If it continues to flow, it will add up. Why wait to buy a house when you can borrow and buy it now because if you wait it may go up in price or, worse, someone else will buy it.

My first warning is that no property is the only property for you. I have been in the property business with shops and offices. Buying the right one is the secret of success. One estate agent got exasperated with me and told me to take a running jump at signing the contract. He seemed to be successful and must have used that advice on other customers so I ran away and bought in the next town. It felt better. Don't be pushed.

If someone else is sniffing around, let them. They are as free as you to make mistakes and I have seen it happen. They saw me as the competitor and over paid, later to discover their mistake.

Car buying is seldom the simple acquisition of a conveyance. A car is a statement. People see you in it. Be successful, buy a Rolls-Royce and you immediately have more enemies than friends. They are jealous. Then let them be. You set your own standards. You are your own person, making your own decisions based on what you know.

A Cascade of Decisions

There can be a cascade of decisions. Get that house and from there you can get to work, the children go to a better school and when the parents-in-law visit they can sleep in the shed down the garden. Great idea until you find it is you in the shed. That starter decision is crucial. Often it is the last piece of the jigsaw. The subsequent ambitions are envisaged and piled on top of the starter decision with such emphasis that the house or car purchase becomes inevitable. The pressure has to be avoided.

I have listened to successful property developers and they all talk of trusting their gut feelings. It is more than that. They had great experience and like all successful people never admit to mistakes that are hidden in history. How else did they come to know so much without making a few mistakes? That gut feeling comes from the brain computing all the factors – location, price, planning laws, funding, occupiers and so on – and when it adds up to the green light "Go" they feel happy and don't show it. They look fed up. The seller is dismayed.

"I thought you liked it."

"I do but it doesn't work at that price." He knows what he is doing.

The Pressure to Decide

For some, the tension is too much. They cannot take the pressure. What stimulates one, scares another. Some will refuse to take decisions. They stick where they are for good or bad. They may blame the government for their plight or they may admit to contentment. They may have made a series of bad decisions. Either way, they are not coping with modern life. Humans are the only species that have this materialistic hierarchy to which ambition attaches. Other creatures subsist in their habitat or suffer if climate change is making it inhospitable but humans make changes. Each generation wants to be better than the parents. People refusing to make decisions can be coerced by others who claim to know what's best for them. The elderly gets pushed around by the youngsters. When I hear the word Nursing Home, I shall have to get on my bicycle and disappear. Maybe there are old folk who can accept television from morning to night. Perhaps they have switched off and not making decisions is the right decision for them.

Compulsive Decisions

Then we see compulsive decision making. I call it addiction. In the betting shop, they study form. Do they really know which dog or horse is the fastest? They don't for if they did, they would become richer every day. For them, making the decision to place a bet is the reward. There is a kick of power that lasts along as the finishing line. If they win, it lasts until the next race. That kick is the drug.

Addicts should be able to stop choosing to drink alcohol or choosing to inject but they don't. In fact, they are not able to make a decision. The choice is coming from a different part of the brain which demands even though it is damaging. Their decision-making ability has failed way back. Why and how is a different story.

Irreversible Decisions

Irreversible decisions are exciting. They have to be right, if not, the result is disaster. There is no going back. Think of leaping out of a plane with a parachute. If the plane is on fire, it is a decision with no choice. If the jump is for fun, the reward is the excitement. There may be a more difficult situation. You may have to move to another

country to reach safety. Stay and die or move and die. If there is a chance of moving and surviving, you move. Migration has become a hot topic especially amongst those who have never faced oppression. The decision is always based on escape, never on attraction of the destination. The only way to stop migration is to improve conditions at the place the migrants left. I meet people from many places in the world and they would all prefer to return to their home country but they can't because conditions are not what they were during childhood. They know they will die in a foreign land. They also know they had no choice when they decided to leave.

Collective Decisions

Some decisions are made by a group of people each contributing their view and ambition. It can be a family with the children wanting to go to the seaside. The parents give way. It can be a board of company directors planning the purchase of another company. The majority vote prevails.

Get the Facts

All decisions follow the assembly of facts. Whether the facts are correct only time will tell and this is where much decision making goes wrong; it is based on what is wanted rather than what is real. If you are the teenager wondering whether university is right for you, do you accept that more study is inevitable at university? Would you prefer to be doing something, making products or talking to customers? Later, with a degree, that is what you end up doing anyway. You do not get a job and rise to the top straight away. A degree is an entry ticket and the useful learning is done on the job.

Collecting the facts on which to base a decision is difficult when you do not know what question to ask. Do not be afraid to ask a question that may seem silly. You have to ask because if you don't, you will never know. Never be afraid to ask the boss, the head teacher or someone said to be important. They achieved their promotion by ability and hard work. On the climb, they will have made mistakes. It is inevitable and making mistakes only once and learning from them is the only way to become wise. A person who boasts a perfect life has never lived. You are looking up at where they are and where you are is where they were forty years ago. They too had to ask the same questions and they will advise you. Try to avoid their mistakes.

Information is readily available on line. We used to have to search in a library. Whether books were more honest than blogs and websites, we shall never know. All that you read is not always true. The more you read, the clearer the picture and if something is incongruous, it probably is. Scientific discoveries render past methods obsolete. Allow for progress. Governments and big business can smother breakthroughs. Those publishing the news, what have they to gain? Question everyone's motives. The more you delve, the more you will fear coming to a decision and this is the stage where you either accept the distorted picture or step back and continue to look around.

Fear of Failure

If explorers and entrepreneurs really knew what lay ahead, they would not have set out on the journey. Many fail on the way. Those who get through and return with riches have problem solved, fought unexpected battles

and endured suffering beyond anything the timid would tolerate. When they made the decision to Go, they knew they were taking risks. Only their resilience saved them. The pull of adventure was stronger than the logic of caution. Emotion powers the decision. It is how you are, your temperament.

The SAS is Britain's elite commando force (Special Air Service). They never say to each other before a mission, "Good luck!" because luck plays no part. Success depends on preparation and training. The decisions to be taken at each stage will have been rehearsed and practiced. If something suddenly changes, they fall back on their quick wit, physical strength and determination. A plan is only good if it allows changes. Going where the SAS have gone is not for everyone. Err on the side of caution. Collect the facts, be sure what you want and make your decision. You are on your own.

