

Choices & Consequences

Breakdown of Choices

Your life is the sum result of all the choices you make, both consciously and unconsciously. If you can control the process of choosing, you can take control of all aspects of your life. You can find the freedom that comes from being in charge of yourself. Quote by Robert Bennett.

There is a lot of truth to break down in that quote. Let us take a look:

- ◇ Sum of all your choices - How often do you take an honest look at the choices you make and take FULL responsibility for them? People often say that "life is unfair" or "you do not know what I have been through". Those statements may be true. However, that will never excuse you from the choices you make. Regardless of what has happened "to you" in the past, you are in charge of your choices today.
- ◇ Conscious or unconscious - Take a look at the choices you make all day long that are **Seemingly Inconsequential Decisions** (SIDs). The consequences of our choices, even SIDs, can come back to bite us. Consider all short-term, long-term and unintended consequences before making choices.
- ◇ Control the process of choosing - Making wise choices takes good self-control. We all know right from wrong. We do know the difference between wants and needs. We know that being kind and responsible brings a different lifestyle than being unkind and irresponsible. Yet, we very often choose the easy road instead of making the hard choice.
- ◇ Take control of your life - Many people believe they are a victim to their circumstances. Others may have made choices that impacted you in the past. However, you get the gift of making choices today that minimize their impact or allow them to remain in control of you. Victim or survivor? You are in control so there is no more blaming the past. Grieve it, yes. But do not let the past be in charge of your future.
- ◇ Freedom from being in charge of yourself - With personal freedom comes personal responsibility. Many would prefer the rights they get from being an adult or in charge of their lives. But those people often forget and even reject the personal responsibility it takes to maintain freedom. Unwise choices remove that freedom because society then has to place limits on them. Is this you?



All Hail the Queen!



Queen Victoria of England was 18 years old when she began to reign and she reigned for 63 years! During her years she was one of the most powerful people in the world. Think about the personal responsibility she had in order to carry such a weight on her shoulders.

Responsibility is hard. Think about areas you have a hard time being responsible.

Making wise choices means that you have an understanding of the consequences that come with each one. Even the clothes you wear sends a message to the world about you. How you carry yourself in conversations or whether you decide to participate in your responsibilities.

The word "consequences" means "with a sequence", one thing follows another. Think of it in terms of "if-then" statements. If I do this, then the likely outcome is.....".

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Choose Well

Crazy Straw - Playing the Lottery



We use the image of the crazy straw to remind us about choices and consequences. Considering the “if-then” concept the straw is a good example of this. “IF” goes in one end and “THEN” comes out the other end. It is a simple concept. If I speed, then I am likely to get a ticket.

Unfortunately, we often “twist” the truth which is what the crazy straw represents. We twist the above statement to sound something like, “If I speed, I might not get a ticket. After all I have not seen a police officer in this area before. Besides, I will probably see them before they see me so I will slow down then. I really need to get to where I am going faster.”

Seeing the truth of potential consequences of getting a ticket would make the average person choose to stay within the speed limits. But twisting the truth gives us the rationale we are looking for to justify an unwise choice. Sometimes we get away with it. In fact, we often get away with facing the consequences of unwise choices. Because of this we take bigger risks. How many times have you made unwise choices and got away with facing negative consequences?

How many times have you had to face negative consequences because of your unwise choices? What makes it hard to choose the wise thing over the unwise thing?



Twisting the truth keeps us from seeing the reality of what can actually happen. It is like gambling with our lives. Yes, the odds are we might not get caught. But what a terrible thing when we do have to face the natural consequences of our choices. Instead of twisting the truth, how about we learn to take responsibility of our choices by making adjustments. For example, leaving earlier for an appointment can keep us from being tempted to speed because we are always late.

Wise Choices Bring Freedom

Hank is a dog that loves to run. So much so that it is difficult to take him anywhere. As soon as he gets a taste of freedom, he is gone.

Kaylee, on the other hand, enjoys her people. She just wants to be with them. Anytime she is with them she stays right by their side.

Which dog do you think has more freedom and why?

The truth is that Kaylee has more freedom because she behaves within the boundaries given to her. Kaylee’s owners are able to take her more places whereas Hank often has to stay at home because he is too hard to handle.

We can learn from Kaylee how living within boundaries actually brings us better consequences than fighting those boundaries.

It can often feel like we are trapped by boundaries. Yet it is all based on how we see it. Hank see’s boundaries as a negative thing. He runs along the fence line hoping to find an opening through which he can escape. But his view of being kept safe within a boundary of a fence is negative and makes it difficult for him to enjoy what he has.

Kaylee appreciates her safety and therefore is given more opportunity to move outside the boundary as a consequence of how she has managed her choices. She is actually more free!

How do your choices impact your freedom?



Hearing ‘No’ Well

It is common to react negatively to the word “no”. What reaction do you have to “no”?

If you react negatively to this word, chances are that you have not been able to have a voice in your choices or others have made choices that negatively impact you. Hearing “no” makes you feel controlled. But that is not always the case.

There is tension for many when we hear the word “no”. Learning to accept it can be hard but it is not impossible. When you find yourself being triggered by that word, use the STOP skill below and critical thinking to understand why you’re being told no.

S (stop what you’re doing)

T (take a step back and look at the big picture)

O (observe all viewpoints and facts)

P (proceed cautiously and with wisdom)

Try challenging your thinking to learn how “no” can actually keep you safe. Identify solutions to learn how to express yourself in an effective and healthy manner.

Double Standards

The phrase, “double standard” means that you expect one thing from others but do not necessarily apply that standard to yourself. It is easy to want others to treat us well. We become offended when they do not. Yet how many times do we not treat others well but instead let ourselves off the hook for such behavior?

Consider this example. Pam says, “I can’t trust anyone so I refuse to let anyone in”. She may feel justified in her standard because others have let her down in the past. This might even make sense that she would not trust others.

On the other hand, what if Pam herself is not trustworthy? If Pam’s behaviors do not show that she can be trusted then it does not seem fair that she hold that same standard for others. Are there areas of your life where you feel you might have double standards?

Have you been affected by someone else who had double standards?

Learning about double standards can help you start holding yourself to a higher standard or even learn to be patient with or forgive others when they do not live up to your standards.



Do not make a permanent decision for your temporary emotion.

Toby Mac

you are **FREE**
TO CHOOSE,
BUT YOU ARE NOT
FREE from the
CONSEQUENCE
OF YOUR **CHOICE**



This action will have consequences...

Connecting the Dots

Choices have a life of their own. Once we make a choice to say or do something, the end result is not always within our control. We have no control over how others respond to our choices. But we can somewhat accurately predict outcomes in most situations.

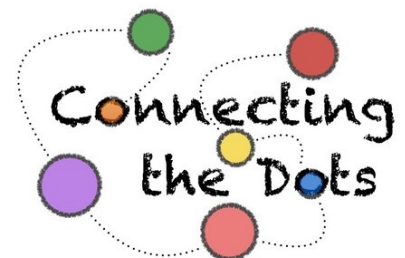
Our choices have natural consequences. But those outcomes change over the course of time. There are consequences that happen in the short-run and there are often different ones in the long-run.

Getting a need met by yelling at someone can be effective in the short-run. That is why some yell. It gets the attention they are looking for and it helps the person get things off their chest. However, in the long-run it can have devastating consequences that are very negative.

This person can find themselves lonely when others do not want to be friends with them due to their unwelcomed reactions to life. They might also find themselves in fights with others or fired from a job.

In addition to short and long-term outcomes, there are also unintended consequences. This angry person may find themselves homeless if they are not able to keep a job. Yet, when they chose to yell at others when their emotions rose, they probably were not intending on being homeless.

There are many consequences we face that may be the result of earlier choices we make. Learning to connect the dots in these cases can help reduce the likelihood that we continue making unwise choices that later cause us problems. Can you think of choices you made in the short-term that have had negative long-term or unintended consequences later down the road?



Principles & Choices

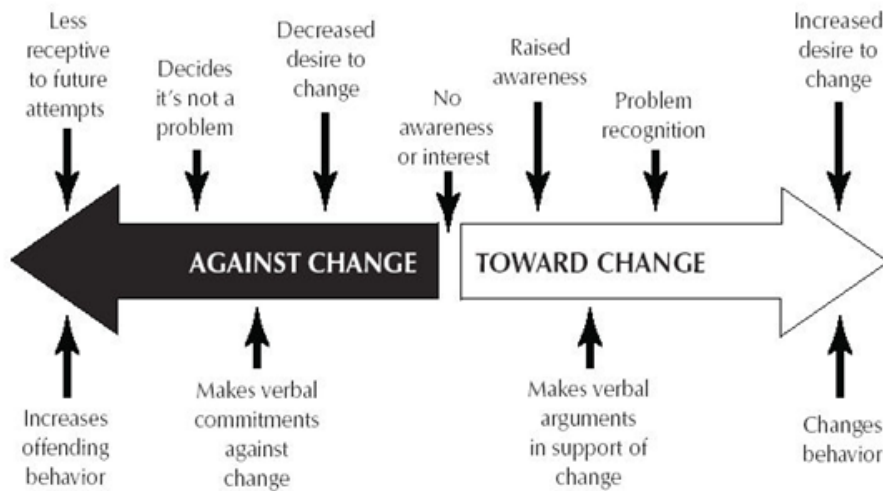
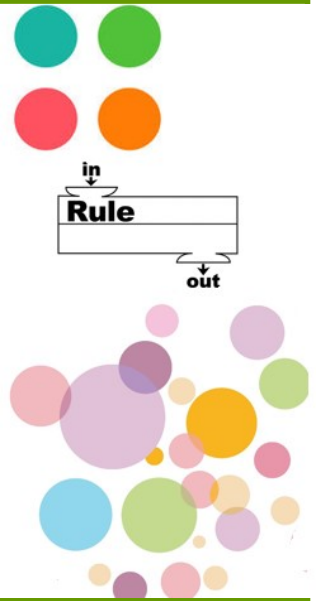
The choices we make are connected to each of the NWC principles. Choices come from our willingness, goals, values and beliefs. These are the “input” to our choices. What goes in will come out.

- ✓ Wanting something is not the same as being willing to get it.
- ✓ Move us toward or away from our goals.
- ✓ Values are subtle and often compete.
- ✓ Beliefs are very subtle. Saying them out loud can feel awkward.

Choices speak to our character, relationships and identity. These are the “outcome” or results of our choices.

- ✓ Those watching determine our character by summing up the choices they see us make.
- ✓ Choosing the best for others over my own desires takes strength and is focused on the relationship.
- ✓ Every choice is writing my story and telling others who I am.

If you find that your life is filled with negativity, take a good look at the quality of choices you make.



You can choose to move toward changing behaviors to reduce the negative outcomes you experience.

Or, you can choose to move against changing. Many choose this one because it is easy.

The right thing to do is the hard thing to do.



A Balanced Life

Having a balanced life can help you begin to make wise choices. Balance is something the brain craves. We use good things to benefit our life. But sometimes we misuse good things. For example, sleep is a good thing. But a person struggling with depression may misuse sleep and is therefore not living a balanced life. Instead, too much sleep causes negative consequences when it is misused.

One of the reasons we find ourselves out of balance is because of pain. We see pain as a bad thing and work hard to eliminate it. Yet, if we could understand that pain is simply sending a message to us that something is wrong, we can accept the pain and learn the skills needed to make necessary corrections.

For example, if someone is upset at you, a reaction might be to become defensive. However, we tend to not hear others when we are defensive. Instead, taking a deep breath and listening to the problem at hand allows us to make corrections needed to restore the relationship.

We know we have a balanced life when we enjoy or are content with our circumstances. An imbalanced life is seen when we experience a lot of stress.

Balance means that we offset the pain by making corrections. Think of a physical wound. It causes pain but if you tend to it correctly, the pain eventually goes away. But if you ignore the pain, infection sets in and causes even more pain. Emotional pain works the same way. Learning to treat our emotional pain can help keep a life in balance.

Everything in Balance



10 REASONS

THE TOP

WE MAKE

UNWISE CHOICES

Denial - It is as if others can see the problems you are facing but you can not. You tell yourself that everything is alright but deep inside you probably know it is not. Quote: The greatest barrier to someone achieving their goal is their denial of needing it.

Simon Travaglia

Anger/Pain - It is as if you hurt so much because of the past that you become stuck there. You can not seem to enter the present to begin the future. Quote: Anger doesn't solve anything. It builds nothing. But it destroys everything.

Group Think - It is as if someone told you that you can not amount to much and you simply accept it without challenging the statement. It is where the idea of "group think" comes from. We do not want to make ourselves stand out so we agree with those around us without knowing why. Quote: Martin Luther King Jr. – The soft-minded man always fears change. He feels security in the status quo, and he has an almost morbid fear of the new. For him, the greatest pain is the pain of a new idea.

Corruption - It is like you see no other way to get ahead but to go against the fabric of society in spite of how others are impacted. You lose your ability to care about your neighbors unless it benefits you. Quote: Lincoln Patz – Great values are built on strong moral foundations. Men become great when they allow these values to take root within their souls and live by them.

Lack of Hope - It is as if you fear trying to make changes will only result in more sadness. Quote: Hope deferred makes the heart sick. The Bible

Lack of Consistency - It is as if you think trying something one time should make big changes. You need to remain consistent. Quote: Lack of consistency can bring on a lack of interest.
Anonymous

Lack of Skills - It is as if you want to make wise choices but you are just not sure how to go about doing it. Quote: Whether you decide you can or you can not, you are right. Anonymous

Blaming or Remaining a Victim - It's like someone putting you in a huge hole in the ground and walking away. You can complain all your life about how unfair that was for someone to do that to you and therefore never get out of the hole, or you can devise a plan for getting yourself out. Staying in the hole, you become a victim. Striving to get out, you become a conqueror. Quote: Benjamin Franklin – People can devise a rationalization for anything they wish rather than admit they're wrong.

Lack of Boundaries - It is as if you know you have skills, passions and a purpose but allow circumstances to tell you differently, leaving you to flounder without direction and accepting this fate as gospel. You let others dictate your value and worth rather than require they rise to your standards. You sell yourself short. Quote: Steve Maraboli – I can't control your behavior; nor do I want that burden. But I will not apologize for refusing to be disrespected, to be lied to, or to be mistreated. I have standards; step up or step out.

Surrender to Others - It is as if growth requires too much effort so you allow circumstances to dictate your life rather than you dictate your life. If the consequences seem difficult, you no longer take a stand. Only from a place of strength can someone turn pain into promise. Quote: Michael Jordan – Any fear is an illusion. You think something is standing in your way but nothing is really there. What is there is an opportunity to do your best and gain some success.



To have a life filled with promise for a good future, it takes many choices together to see the results. Think about the tree on the left. Imagine that tree represents the future you want for yourself. Describe what that future might include.

Imagine the roots of the tree representing the choices you need to make in order to get that future. What kind of choices will it take to get that future? What makes it hard to make those choices?

Life or Death?

Now imagine your life if you do not make wise choices. The image of the tree on the right represents an unfulfilled life. What might that life look like? What do you fear the most when you think about your future?

Imagine the roots of the tree representing the choices you would make in order to have a life that does not bring joy or happiness. What kind of choices do you think that might be? How do you benefit from making these kind of choices?



I am learning to
love the sound of
my feet walking
away from things
not meant for me.

React or Respond?

Something happens and you make a choice.
That choice is either a response or a reaction.

Reactions are impulsive and almost completely
emotional. They are your knee jerk way of
handling things. In the long-run they usually
bring more problems than they solve.

Responding, on the other hand, is a thoughtful
way to handle a situation you find yourself in. It
requires that you engage your logic brain in
order to override emotions you feel. Responding
to a situation takes a lot of energy but usually
brings better outcomes.

Share about a time where you reacted and a
time when you responded. What made it hard
to respond in one instance but easier in the
other?

My Reaction

My Response

Misuse of Good Things

All addictions and destructive behaviors have their root in good things. Considering the definition of good by using the word beneficial in place of good things.

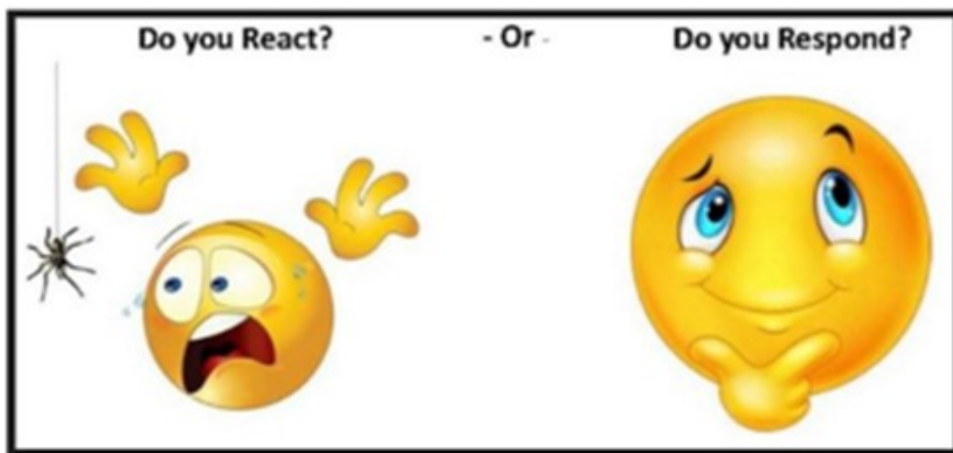
The problem is that we lose track of how to use these good or beneficial things properly (manage them) and they become a way of satisfaction for us and the good (beneficial) thing begins to manage us rather us manage them.

Consider good (beneficial) things in your life that you have mismanaged to the point where it began managing you – and you lost control.

The reason you misuse good things is that they bring you pleasure. You are wired for relationships to bring you pleasure. But if you have been harmed by relationships, you begin looking for alternative things to make yourself happy.

Healing will help bring these things into balance once you recognize the problems caused by misusing them. Start by identifying ways you misuse common things.

Examples of Good Things	How They Were Misused
✓ Being in a program	_____
✓ Relationships	_____
✓ Medications	_____
✓ Food	_____
✓ Money	_____



Getting in the Way of Myself

Our personalities are different. Take some time, if you have not already, to complete a personality assessment. Consider some ways that your personality makes it hard for you to make wise choices in certain circumstances. For example, yellow's tend to be more impulsive. They will need to learn self-discipline more than a green would because green's are very analytical. They tend to weigh pros/cons before choosing.

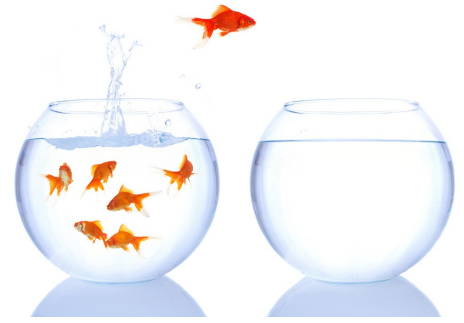
Traits that get in your way:

Pain of Staying the Same

Most people will avoid change simply because the emotional brain likes the comfort of staying the same. Trying to routines or having to think at the conscious level requires much more energy than ignoring our problems.

In order to jump out of the “now” and into the “future”, you will have to decide that the pain of staying the same is greater than the pain or discomfort to change.

It will take great strength to do new things. Strengthening your “discomfort” muscle is an important job in order to maintain new habits or ways of thinking.



Choose to Win

I Choose to WIN

If you have identified areas of your life that you need to start making wise choices in order to improve your quality of life, then you need to recognize what it will take to win the battle before you.

There will indeed be moments that the struggle will be so hard that you will be tempted to quit. Do not! But make sure you think about these things.

Always
REMEMBER
YOUR Why

Long-term change will not happen until YOU want it to. Others might want you to change. But you need to figure out why it is important to you. What is the change you want to make and what is the benefit of this change?

What might be a benefit to change the following?

Lose weight _____

Trust others _____

Stop smoking _____

Finish school _____

What I want to change is _____

Why I want to change is _____

Know what success looks like. Break that up into smaller “milestones” so you can celebrate successes along the way. For example, if you want to lose 20 pounds, celebrate every 5 pounds lost.

Success looks like _____

Success along the way looks like _____

Have a plan to reduce the likelihood of giving up too soon. There will be times of struggle. If you anticipate them you can plan for them.

Those who I will ask for support and accountability are _____

If I feel like quitting, I have asked them to _____

Do not forget the importance of the following to increase your ability to accomplish your goal of change.

- | | |
|------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| ✓ Be patient - change takes time | ✓ Allow for setbacks now and then |
| ✓ Be disciplined - do it even when you do not feel like it | ✓ Reframe struggles into opportunities |
| ✓ Celebrate small steps | ✓ Grieve the loss and embrace the benefit of change |
| ✓ Practice good self-care | ✓ Keep reminding yourself of the benefits of your new choices |
| ✓ Lean on your support system | ✓ The pain of consequences leads to motivation for change |

Set your eyes on what is ahead.

Directions:

- All questions are “behavior” based, meaning that you are rating yourself on what you “do” rather than what you “know”.
- Answer the questions below by rating yourself as follows:

0 - Does not apply to me at all.

1 - Applies sometimes, but not often.

2 - Applies to me often.

3 - I have this one down on a regular basis.

Check the boxes of the behavior you would like to work on during this section.

Pre		Post
	I use my gift of choice well and take seriously the responsibility I have for my quality of life.	
	I regularly look to get effective long-term outcomes rather than short-term gratification.	
	I work hard not to twist the truth but to be realistic about the possible consequences.	
	I am working in hearing “no” well. I do not get upset each time I hear it but am learning to respect it.	
	I do not have double standards. I expect the same from others as I do for myself. (such as trust)	
	My choices show that I am working toward personal growth and change.	
	If my choices were a tree for wise choices, my tree would be green and fruitful, not dying.	
	I work hard not to misuse good things in my life.	
	I can “connect the dots” between consequences I face and the choices I have made.	
	I have recognized that there is more pain in staying unhealthy so I am working toward change.	

“I Will” Statements

To get closer to my Big Hairy Goal, “I Will” do the following:

◇

◇

◇

◇

What I Got Out of This Section
