

A short guide on how to Make Better Decisions

Decision-making

Love it or hate, we all have to do it, in some form or other.

Some people are better at doing it than others. And some people find themselves incapable of making any decision, good or bad, and just dither and dither, getting nowhere.

This guide is for everyone on the decision-making spectrum - to give you a better understanding and a few tips to help you improve your decision-making.

Firstly, consider decision-making as a whole.

Do you find all decisions difficult to make? Or is it just certain decisions? Perhaps it is just the ones that are most important to you, such as changing jobs, moving house?

If you can understand whether there is a pattern to your decision-making process and your ability to make them, or not, this will help. Just because you have struggled to make one or two decisions in the past, it does not necessarily make you a poor decision-maker.



Behind most of our decisions, is a back story, an event or situation leading up to the decision.

In order to make a 'clean' decision, it is important to try not to get too caught up in the back story as your emotions are likely to take over. Work out exactly what it is you are deciding on.

For example, if you're thinking of changing jobs, instead of thinking of what's wrong with your current job and all the things that you don't want, look to make a decision on all the things that you do want.

The pros and cons!

If you think it is going to be a useful exercise, make a list of the pros and cons of what you are deciding on.

The important thing about this list is not to dwell on it.

Don't overthink it. This list will only be beneficial to you if you are going to use it to help you make a decision, by being able to see what you will and won't compromise on.



Understand your values.

If you understand your values, when you know what is important to you, it is easier to make a decision.

We have all heard someone say "it just felt right", or "my gut was telling me not to do it"; this indicates that they were tapping into their values on a subconscious level.

For example, if one of your values is honesty, it is very likely you will decide to tell the truth wherever possible, as lying would make you feel uncomfortable.

Get to know your emotions.

Our emotions have a big influence on our decision-making. If we are feeling anxious or stressed, the decision-making part of our brain (the pre-frontal cortex or 'thinking brain') gets hijacked and stops working properly.

We find it difficult to think rationally as we are feeling under threat and this can paralyse any chance of making a decision. Instead our limbic system, responsible for our emotional responses, takes over and makes a decision based on emotion which isn't always the best!



At this point, you first need to recognise you are feeling anxious or stressed (ie: getting to know your emotions), then take a step back. Do whatever helps you to relax - go for a walk, talk to a friend, have a bath, make a cup of tea etc. Sleep on it if you have time.

Let your brain recharge and get functioning properly again. Look at what is within your control and what isn't. We cannot make a decision on things out of our control.

And realise that sometimes no decision is going to be perfect; sometimes just making a decision that is 'good enough' will be okay.

Some people find it helpful to look at the decision as a 'task' and remove any emotion from it. The decision then becomes part of your 'to do' list - you either choose to do it or you don't!

And if you end up not doing it, and days and weeks go by, does a decision really need to be made? How important is it if you haven't given it your time and attention?

Another way is to look at previous decisions and what worked well for you in the past.



Now you know that emotions play a big part in decision-making, think back to a good decision you made and consider how you were feeling at the time. Were you relaxed, feeling in control, confident?

Then ask yourself, what do you need to be thinking now to put your emotions in a similar place?

Nobody sets out to make a bad decision so it is important to believe in yourself, trust yourself, be kind to yourself, and know that you will make the best decision possible with the information you have.

At the other end of the decision-making spectrum, it could be that you are over-confident.

When we are over-confident, we tend to lack judgment; there is limited understanding and empathy on how our decision might affect others. We become 'blinkered'.

If you are feeling 'over-confident' about a decision, take a pause to check with yourself to see if you have considered all the options and the impact your decision may have on others. Perhaps check in with a trusted friend on what they think too.



And if you are still finding it tricky to make a decision,
try asking yourself a couple of questions:

- How much energy do you have for this decision?
 - What's getting in the way of you being able to make a decision?
 - What are you getting out of by being indecisive?
 - Will your decision lead to more or less happiness?
 - What would make this decision safe?
 - What are the assumptions you are making about this decision?
 - What would you advise your best friend to do in this situation?
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If you've found my **How to make Better Decisions** guide useful,
I'd love to hear from you. It's great to connect with people & hear their
feedback - see contact details below.

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