DECISION MAKING

Have you ever rolled a dice to decide who goes first in a game? Flipped a coin to decide between two outfits you really wanted to wear? Relying on chance is a perfectly legitimate way to make decisions for yourself in some cases, but only when the outcome of any decision isn’t really important. You probably shouldn’t be flipping a coin to decide if you should try parkour for the first time from the tallest buildings in town. If the outcome of a decision you need to make is life or death, or certain to be life-changing, you really should be using a more sophisticated tool set to make your decision.

HERE ARE SOME THOUGHTFUL DECISION-MAKING METHODS THAT MAY HELP YOU MAKE THE NEXT IMPORTANT DECISION IN YOUR LIFE:

PROS & CONS

Put together two lists, one with all the good that may come with your decision, and one with all the bad that may come with your decision. Is one list clearly longer than the other? Is one list weighted more heavily than the other? If you’re trying to decide if you should drive home after you’ve consumed several alcoholic beverages, your “pro” list might be longer than your “con” list; however—if you’re considering the real, possible outcomes of a decision to drive after drinking—there will be at least two items on your “con” list that heavily outweigh the items on your “pro” list: you could seriously harm or kill yourself or others, and you could go to prison.

THOUGHT EXPERIMENTS

This method requires some imagination and practice to work well, but thought experiments can help you envision what your life might look like after making any particular decision. Imagine that you accept that job in Wyoming you were recently offered. How might life in a rural state be different than your current life in the bustling metropolitan area of Seattle? What might you do for fun in Wyoming? Can you imagine yourself being happy with your new responsibilities and in your new setting? If not, it might be best to pass on that job offer.

RESEARCH OUTCOMES OF SIMILAR DECISIONS OTHERS HAVE MADE

We live in the information age of the Internet, so you have a wealth of knowledge and experience just a search query or two away whenever you have access to the Web. No matter the choice you are faced with, you can almost always be sure that others have had to make the same decision, or one very similar, and you can learn about their experiences online. Some social platforms will even give you the opportunity to converse with people who have had to make a decision like the one you are contemplating. This is a great way to get some idea of the real-world implications of a decision you must make.

What items did others consider before making their decisions? Did any people find, in retrospect, that they failed to consider something that turned out to be important? Are they happy with the decisions they made, and would they do anything differently if given the chance to do it over again? The answers to these questions may help you make the best decision possible.

INVOLVE A PERSON YOU TRUST

Especially for those decisions that are sure to have a dramatic impact on your life, and possibly the lives of close friends and family, you will always do well to consult with a person—or persons—you trust to have your best interests in mind. Another person can help keep your decision-making processes as objective as possible, increasing the likelihood that your decisions will lead to the best possible outcomes.

Be careful, though, not to fall into the trap of total reliance on others to make your decisions. Consulting with a trusted person should be done in addition to using any of the methods outlined above, not as a complete replacement to thoughtful decision-making processes.

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