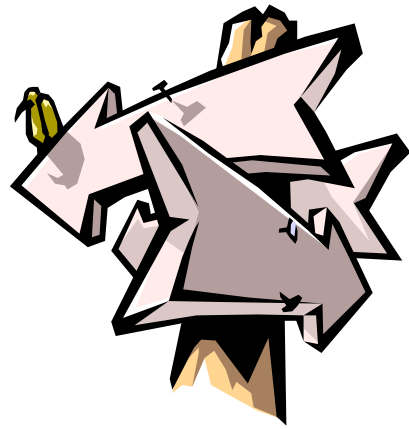


# Making better choices

Of course there are great benefits in having freedom of choice. But for many people the overwhelming number of choices we have to make every day can leave us stressed out, uncertain, paralyzed with indecision. Fliers pour through our letter box asking us to choose. In the supermarket we have to choose between at least 6 different types of potato. As children move into adulthood, they no longer learn their parents' trade or the regional industry, but are presented with a huge range of apparent career options. The sheer quantity of choice can lead to difficulty making decisions, self-doubt, regret, anxiety and stress.



So what can we do to make choosing easier and better? These are some of the skills you might find useful.

## **Choose when to choose**

Sometimes it makes sense to invest a great deal of time and effort in taking a decision – when the issue is of critical importance or when we simply enjoy lingering over the decision. But sometimes it is simply not worth wasting time on a decision-making process when the issue is unimportant. A critical skill is to distinguish between the choices that matter and those that don't.

## **Begin with the outcome in mind**

If you begin with the range of *options* in mind, you can easily become bogged down in comparing and contrasting their various features. If, on the other hand, you start by getting clear exactly what your desired *outcome* will be, you will find it easier to choose or create the best options. You become a chooser (proactive) rather than a picker (reactive).

## **Distinguish between 'good enough' and 'best'**

When faced with a decision, some people are only ever content with 'the best'. Others are content with something that meets their

standards and are not concerned that somewhere out in the world there may be better alternatives. Aiming for best is a 'maximising' strategy; aiming for 'good enough' is a 'satisfying' strategy. In reality no-one can maximise on every decision – there simply isn't the time. The skill here is to be able to distinguish between the two types of strategy, and to deliberately select the types of decision when you are prepared to settle for 'good enough'.

### **Avoid being a slave to short-term pleasure**

People have a tendency to adapt to both good and bad events. If for example we get a pay rise, we might be really happy for a few months, but before long we are taking it for granted. We are bound to find choices more difficult if we are driven by a constant search for short-term pleasures. But if we remind ourselves that, whether we choose a 28-inch or 24-inch TV screen, we will be taking it for granted one year from now, we might find these kinds of choice less challenging.

*The following exercise may help you learn about your ways of choosing:*

- 1. Make a list of several recent decisions you have made, both large and small.*
- 2. For each decision, write down everything you did as you worked through the various options and possibilities. How did you go about reaching the decisions? Try to estimate how much time you invested in each.*
- 3. For each decision, also write down how it felt to go through the process.*
- 4. Finally estimate how much your final decisions benefited from the time and energy you put into them. Were the outcomes worth it? Could you have done as well, or better, with less effort? How might some of the 'choosing skills' (described above) have helped?*