



## The Choice Is Yours

JULY 24, 2012

**W**e're all confronted by countless choices each day. Some have minimal consequences, such as whether to have our ice cream in a cup or cone, while other decisions can be life changing. And while some of these choices may impact our lives today, other choices may not affect us for years to come.

We are a product of the choices we make. Each decision helps to define who we are and how we're different from one another.

Unfortunately, some folks prefer to make their decisions in a haphazard fashion. They "shoot from the hip" or flip a coin rather than reviewing their options in a deliberate manner. Others make decisions in a vacuum without taking time to collect the facts or consider the consequences. Still others simply follow the crowd to avoid taking personal responsibility, or they base their decisions solely on the advice of another person, rather than on an idea's true merits. Lastly, some individuals are more interested in checking an item off their to-do list than in making a sound choice. In this case, expediency trumps effectiveness.

Of course, not every decision requires in-depth analysis. Some should be practically "automatic," like stepping on the brake pedal when the traffic ahead begins to slow down. And applying lessons learned from your past experiences can help make the decision process more automatic and less traumatic. But poor choices do have their consequences, and being fully engaged in the decision process is a good practice in itself.

### It's Your Choice: Values Matter

Personal values should serve as your guiding star in making good choices. Values are like a pilot's flight plan . . . without them, you're flying blind. Unfortunately, some people don't take the time to define them.

Take a moment and consider the following items. Each question is designed as a continuum, so your response doesn't have to be limited to one extreme, or another.

Remember, there's no right or wrong answer to each question. The answer that you provide should be the right one for YOU.

**Life Balance:** Do you put more effort into building your career or spending time with friends and family?

**Self-Satisfaction:** Do you spend more time trying to please yourself or to satisfy others?

**Willpower:** Do you try to eliminate bad habits or simply give in?

**Risk:** Are you risk averse or would you gamble to win big?

**Accepting Advice:** Do you seek the advice of professionals (such as doctors, financial advisors, and attorneys) or go it alone?

**Integrity:** Are you willing to turn a blind eye to your **conscience** to achieve personal gain?

**Commitments:** Are you more apt to make serious commitments or to live a happy-go-lucky life?

**Wants-Needs:** Do you spend more time enjoying what you have or upgrading your belongings?

**Opportunity:** Are you content with your existing situation or willing to explore exciting new opportunities?

**Healthy Living:** Are you more inclined to follow a healthy diet or to yield to temptation?

**Trust:** Do you put trust and faith in other people or rely mostly upon yourself?

**Work Ethic:** Are you willing to pay your dues today by working hard as an investment in your future, or do you prefer to take it easy and possibly limit your opportunities?

**Relationships:** Do you put more effort into developing deep relationships or casual friendships?

We are a product  
of the choices  
we make.

**Saving:** Are you more inclined to save for a rainy day or to shop till you drop?

**Personal Growth:** Do you invest time in self-development, or are you comfortable where you are in life?

**Purpose:** Do you measure **success** by what you give to others or by how much you've personally gained?

The preceding list isn't intended to be exhaustive. Its purpose is to get you thinking and to help you define who you are and what you stand for. One of the realities is that every choice you make in life has both a benefit and a cost. For example, saving versus spending. People who fail to save for a rainy day may enjoy the satisfaction that comes with their new acquisitions, but they wind up disappointed when unforeseen expenses blindside them. On the other hand, folks who save too much may be depriving themselves and their loved ones of things that they truly need.

### **It's Your Choice: Take Charge**

Making good choices begins with taking charge of the decision-making process.

Start by **Managing the Big Stuff**. It's very easy to get sidetracked by insignificant issues in life. If you spend a lot of time on trivial stuff, you won't have time to contemplate things that matter. **Values Matter**. As we've noted, make decisions that are consistent with your core beliefs and values. The alternative invariably leads to regret. **Learn from the Past**. Learn from your experiences and the experiences of others. Identify situations where you've had a similar choice in the past. How can you apply those lessons learned to the existing situation? **Know What You Know and What You Don't Know**. Don't try to be an expert in everything. Seek input and advice when variables lie outside your comfort

zone. **Keep the Right Perspective**. View an issue from every vantage point. What do the facts say? What is your intuition telling you? Don't overlook the obvious. Is your conscience trying to tell you something? Listen up. **Don't Procrastinate**. You'll rarely have all the information that you need to make a "perfect" decision. So, don't demand perfection. As Voltaire once said, "The perfect is the enemy of the good." **Once You Make a Decision, Don't Look Back, Make It Work**. Don't second-guess yourself. You can't relive the past. It's a waste of valuable time and energy.

### **It's Your Choice: Define Success in Your Own Terms**

Life's not about checking one more item off your to-do list or trying to impress others with how busy you are. Life's about being happy with where you've been, where you are now, and where you're going. It's about being proud of who you are, what you represent, and the impact that you're having on others. This begins and ends with the choices that you make. So, give some serious thought to every choice you face. As Albert Camus once said, "Life is a sum of all your choices." Are you happy with the path that you're choosing for yourself? The choice is yours.

---

Frank Sonnenberg, a marketing strategist, has written four books and published over 300 articles. *Managing with a Conscience (2nd edition)* is recognized as one of the top 10 Small Business Books of 2012 • Trust Across America named Sonnenberg one of the Top 100 Thought Leaders of 2011 and 2012 • Sonnenberg was nominated one of America's Most Influential Small Business Experts of 2012 • In 2011, *Social Media Marketing Magazine* (SMM) selected Sonnenberg as one of the top marketing authors in the world on Twitter. [www.franksonnenbergonline.com](http://www.franksonnenbergonline.com)  
©2012 Frank Sonnenberg. All rights reserved.