

What Do You Think I Should Do? (Part 2)

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We started last week looking at how you might respond to this question. And I suggested that you avoid the seduction of answering it outright. (If you'd like to see that article, you can look on "Dennis' blog" on my website, or contact me and I'll provide a copy.)

Also last week, I provided a step-by-step description of the process we all use to make decisions. Let me provide a quick review. You start with a situation that you face. You generate some options for how to respond (if a big decision, I recommend at least five options). Then you choose from among those possibilities. (I promised last week to explain how you make that choice, and I will in this article.)

Once you've selected the approach you intend to execute, you make it happen. And usually, there's some rather immediate short-term outcome, but there's always a longer-term outcome that follows.

At the close of last week's article, I asked two questions. Which do you think we human beings focus on more strongly, option generation or option selection? And which do you think we humans consider more when we make a decision, the short-term outcomes or the long-term outcomes?

I think most leaders consider themselves to be action-oriented. They may take the time to consider a few possibilities, but they tend to make decisions quickly. There are usually too many demands on their time to creatively consider multiple options. If they can find something that works, they go with it!

Here's another piece of evidence to support my contention that most of us focus on option selection over option generation. I started last week speculating that the question that is the title for this article has been asked of you frequently.

How often has someone come to you and asked, "I'm facing a tough situation; will you help me generate some options for how I might respond?" You'd probably be quite surprised if that happened!

Yet generating options is superb help for a struggling individual. You can't know exactly what the situation is, how the individual perceives its meaning, and what desired outcome he or she seeks.

Sure, you can spend time to learn all that. But think how much better your service would be if you responded with, "I'm sure I couldn't figure out what's best from among the many options available to you. But I'm willing to help you think of possible responses, then evaluate each one with you."

That approach takes the pressure off of you and still helps the individual. Remember, if you answer the question outright, and if the person follows your advice and the outcome is disastrous, who will the individual feel is responsible for the failure? Further, realize that you offer a much greater service if you help that person execute a more effective and productive approach to decision making.

Now, let's look at the second question I asked. Which do you think we humans consider more when we make a decision, the short-term outcomes or the long-term outcomes? Some people I ask insist they focus on the long-term outcomes. But by far, most people respond with "We want immediate gratification!" The world of fast food and microwave ovens causes us to seek what we want right away!

Even if a person selects an option that will likely deliver a desirable long-term outcome, he or she will be tempted repetitively by attractive short-term opportunities. All it takes is to succumb to the seduction of immediate gratification, and the long-term satisfaction can be compromised! That short-term outcome keeps tempting us as we wait, and wait, and wait for the long-term to materialize!

I promised I would explain how you choose which option to pursue from among the many you've generated. There are two very different contributors. The first is your belief about which option is most likely going to provide the outcome you desire.

Of course, you can't guarantee a particular outcome. There are too many factors that influence what will occur. Still, you subjectively evaluate probabilities, and you go with the option that you think will most likely deliver the outcome you desire.

The second factor is not as obvious. Your values are always influencing your behaviors, preventing some and insisting on others. Your values are so pervasive that they won't allow you to generate some options. For example, think about the most recent time you were short on cash. Did you consider robbing a bank? Of course not! Such an action is not even generated among your possibilities.

The effect of your values may not be obvious, even to you. Yet your values are always there, operating in the background, influencing every decision you make.

Your choices, then, are a combination of how each option aligns with your personal values and how likely you believe each option will deliver the outcome that you desire.

Can you see how an innocent request for your help can be turned into a learning opportunity? By creating an environment for collaboration, you offer even better help than was requested!

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