

## **Making Choices (Choice Model)**

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You make hundreds, maybe thousands of choices a day. You do it easily. Occasionally a big decision comes along and you may anguish over it, but most choices are pretty routine.

Has it ever occurred to you that where you are in life today is a function of thousands of days, each filled with choices? If you think back, I'm sure there are some decisions you've made that, had you chosen differently, your circumstances would be quite different today. That makes you realize the overwhelming truth that where you will be in the not-so-distant future involves the many choices you make today and tomorrow!

My work with students, family members, hourly workers, and organizational leaders has caused me to be very aware that many people give little thought to the choices that they make. We are all faced many times a day with situations that call for some kind of response!

So our model for making decisions begins with "a situation."

In response to that situation, you might do just about anything! Therefore, the second step in this simple "choice model" is "option generation," an overt process of creativity in which you imagine a variety of alternatives.

As anyone who has been trained in the technique of brainstorming knows, this is where you can go crazy with the creativity. No evaluating at this stage, just crank out as many ideas as you can!

The next step is evaluating all those imaginative ideas to whittle down to the one you believe will deliver what you'd most like to occur. This step is called "option selection," and it's really the crux of the choice-making process.

Though this step could be analyzed very scientifically, you usually decide quickly what action you will take. Sometimes you may take the time to ask a friend, "What would you do in this situation?" And the friend, desiring to help, will usually respond. You then compare the friend's answer with your own, and you usually consider that a rigorous evaluation process.

Finally, we get around to taking the action. Some people forget that nothing happens until you DO something. Seriously, some people have lots of ideas (and generate lots of "to do" lists), but have a very hard time actually doing it. Once you make the mental decision, it's quite simple--just do it!

There's more to the model! For every action you take, there are outcomes. Actually, there are really two outcomes, both associated with the passage of time. The first one is "short-term outcomes" and eventually, the "long-term outcomes" make their presence known.

We humans like immediate response, so we usually make our choices based on how rewarding the "short-term outcomes" are likely to be. If I eat a chocolate chip cookie, the immediate outcome is that my sweet tooth is pleased. I tend to overlook the long-term effect of that cookie filling a few fat cells around my waistline!

The first part of this model, where you do your thinking, gives you insight as to what's important to you and what you like best. Though you may consciously evaluate the possible outcomes, the truth is that most choices are made based on the value system you've developed to this point in your life. That's usually not a conscious process. Your values are so ingrained in you, so much a part of who you are that many people are not able to articulate their values when asked about them.

Interestingly enough, once you take whatever action you've chosen, your values and desires no longer have any effect. The outcomes are determined solely by the principles that God set into place when He created the universe. People are often surprised by the effects of their behaviors, especially that the "long-term outcomes" are so different from what they had expected.

Regret and guilt are sometimes the long-term outcomes of behaviors. Recognizing that we all make mistakes, forgiving ourselves and being more conscious next time may keep us from repeating those particularly hard choices.