



Self-Support for Making a Difficult Decision

These are some general guidelines I remind myself of when I need to make what has the initial appearance of a *difficult* decision. I use them to help contain the dilemma and keep it manageable, especially by defusing its appearance of urgency and a reason for unhealthy stress. I encourage you to adapt them for your own use.

- 1 As much as you would like someone else to decide for you, it is your life and vital that you make the choice and accept full responsibility for the consequences of it. (This reminder helps me focus on my inner resources and draws out some of my strengths.)
- 2 Remember, all decisions are, in the end, emotional decisions. While it's important to gather the data and do the logical/rational processing, the answer will not eventually emerge from the part of our brain that deals in logical rationality. (As I understand some research into brain functioning¹, incoming data is first checked-in at an emotional level, is next processed logically and then checked-out emotionally before culminating in a decision.)
- 3 Do the (rational) work. Do the research. Clarify and focus on the issues. Distinguish them as separate issues, if you can. These are your responsibilities, alone. (Even when you intend to use your mentor, coach or some other source of skilled support, you still benefit from diligent and methodical digging, clarifying and exploring.)
- 4 Define the problems to which one decision or another may be an appropriate solution. Clarify the causes of those problems: their resolution may have nothing (or a lot) to do with the options you're currently confronting. Remember to define a problem as something that **is** happening, rather than as something that is not. E.g., "*I can't make up my mind*" is not a useful problem statement.² "*I am currently confused and immobilised.*" is a more useful definition to which "*How come . . . ?*" questions will throw greater light than the former.
- 5 Remind yourself that perfect decisions are not required or possible. Nor is it likely that the decision in question is critical.
- 6 The external situation may represent your being provided with an opportunity (or a further opportunity) to resolve something about yourself. What may be more important than the *pros* and *cons* surrounding the issues and problems are your answers to these questions: *From my perspective alone, what is the **purpose** of this dilemma (in my life or to me)? What would be the purpose of making this decision or that change?* This requires real self-honesty. It may take you some time. Each time you find an answer, ask of it, *So that what . . . ?* Ask the question again until you've reached some self-insight. If you have no answers to the question, ask it anyway and be patient.
- 7 Ask yourself *Where and how does this fit within my Higher Purpose or my Big Picture?* This is closely related to the previous item.

¹ Especially by Antonio Damasio.

² See the Problem Solving articles in this site, for further information about the problem-defining process.

- 8 Ask of the intuitive guidance system or spiritual wisdom you usually seek and trust, *What would you have me do?* Be patient: don't force an answer but do try listening to your hunches.
- 9 Honour the significance of the dilemma, without over-dramatising it. Once you've done the work (some or all of the above), give the process the time and space and attention it deserves; be alert, be open to the answer. You may need courage to let the problem lie on the table for a while. Trust that the issue will work out.
- 10 Consider taking a retreat to somewhere where you'll be alone for a few days (or even an hour or two a day). In that time, do *right brain* activities rather than fret about the decision: walk, fish, swim, jog, kayak, read a novel, paint or draw, write poetry, garden, meditate, for example.

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