

DECISION TIME!

*Better Decisions for a Better
Life*

*By
Richard Davidson*

“DECISION TIME! Better Decisions for a Better Life” by Richard Davidson
ISBN 978-1-60264-063-4 (softcover) 978-1-60264-064-1 (hard cover).

Library of Congress Control Number on file with Publisher.

Published 2007 by Virtualbookworm.com Publishing Inc., P.O. Box 9949, College Station, TX 77842, US. ©2007, Richard Davidson. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of Richard Davidson.

Manufactured in the United States of America.

This book is dedicated to the memory of my mother-in-law, Mildred Knol, who would lengthily vacillate between any two choices she faced, but who was loved by all who had the privilege of meeting her.

Cover art by Kim Nelson

I would like to acknowledge with great thanks the support of my wife Jean during the writing of this book and the time devoted by test readers of my manuscript and the constructive comments they generated.

Table of Contents

CHAPTER 1- WHY YOU ARE WHERE YOU ARE.....	1
CHAPTER 2- DIFFICULTIES IN MAKING DECISIONS	5
CHAPTER 3- THE SUBJECTIVE NATURE OF DECISIONS—DAVIDSON’S DOCTRINE.....	8
CHAPTER 4- COROLLARIES TO DAVIDSON’S DOCTRINE	16
CHAPTER 5- SEQUENCES OF DECISIONS	24
CHAPTER 6- THE CONCEPT OF PERSONAL LOGIC	27
CHAPTER 7- SETTING PRIORITIES	32
CHAPTER 8- NEGOTIATION AND DIPLOMACY.....	38
CHAPTER 9- DYNAMICS OF DECISIONS.....	49
CHAPTER 10- DECISIONS IN GAMES	52
CHAPTER 11- MULTIPLE POSSIBILITY DECISIONS	62
CHAPTER 12- REVERSING DECISIONS	65
CHAPTER 13- TEAMWORK AND DECISIONS	70
CHAPTER 14- WHO’S IN CHARGE?.....	75
CHAPTER 15- SMALL AND LARGE DECISIONS.....	78
CHAPTER 16- DECISIONS AND PLANNING	88
CHAPTER 17- MORALITY AND CONSCIENCE IN DECISION-MAKING.....	92
CHAPTER 18- PERSONAL AND SOCIETAL DECISIONS	95

CHAPTER 19- RELIGION AND CULTURE IN DECISIONS	99
CHAPTER 20- THE TIME DIMENSION OF DECISIONS	104
CHAPTER 21- RESOURCE ALLOCATION DECISIONS	108
CHAPTER 22- DECISIONS REQUIRING LONG-TERM COMMITMENT	116
CHAPTER 23- EXPECTATIONS AND DECISIONS.....	120
CHAPTER 24- MAKING COMPLEX DECISIONS	124
CHAPTER 25- EXECUTION OF DECISIONS.....	129
CHAPTER 26- WHEN DECISIONS MAKE THEMSELVES	132
CHAPTER 27- EXPLAINING DECISIONS AND MAKING EXCUSES.....	135
CHAPTER 28- WHEN ALL CHOICES ARE GOOD	138
CHAPTER 29- THE BUYING DECISION	140
CHAPTER 30- INVESTMENT DECISIONS	145
CHAPTER 31- IMPACTING POLITICAL AND GOVERNMENT DECISIONS.....	150
CHAPTER 32- WHEN OTHER PEOPLE MAKE DECISIONS FOR YOU	155
CHAPTER 33- DECISIONS YOU WOULD RATHER NOT MAKE.....	159
CHAPTER 34- END OF LIFE DECISIONS.....	164
CHAPTER 35- GOOD/BETTER/BEST DECISIONS	167

Chapter 1

Why You Are Where You Are

Where you are in life today is the result of the combination of all of the past decisions which you have made or which have been made for you in response to the various situations and events, both expected and unexpected, which have impacted your life. The decisions which you have not yet made and future decision-stimulating events will determine your continuing life circumstances. If you were able to review all of those past decisions, including the millions of small ones, and change a few here and there, you would end up in a greatly changed situation from the one you have now. This is why the making of decisions in life is so important. In fact, one could say that the story of your life is the record of all of those decisions and the events that stimulated them plus the results of those decisions. Because of this, it is very important to learn how

to make good decisions and to evaluate their results in order to improve your future.

As an illustration of the effect a decision can make on the rest of your life, consider what Robert Frost wrote:

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

The Road Not Taken [1916]

As indicated above, changes in past decisions—if possible—would lead to a different life situation than the one you have now. However, it is important to note that there is no way to know whether such changes would lead to a better or worse condition than your present one. It is even possible that over the course of time your changed situation would merge with your current path. This might be the case if there is fate or divine guidance in your life, but it might also be the result of basic personal inclinations shaping future decisions toward a personally desired result that may be either clearly known or buried in your subconscious.

The Robert Frost poem not only illustrates how a decision made today can affect the rest of your life, but it also shows that such a life-changing decision does not have to be a major one. A simple act of taking a different path at any crossroads along the course of your journey can have great and unforeseeable implications for you and for everyone else with whom you interact. Consider the wanderings of the Biblical Israelites led by Moses on their way to the Promised Land of Canaan from Egypt. They wandered in the desert for forty years before

they arrived at their destination, while the straight-line path was less than two hundred miles. This book will help you to decide when changes in direction are desirable and advantageous for you.

In thinking back over past decisions and redirections in the course of your life, you should not engage in the practice of regretting either actual past decisions or those which should have been made but were left undone. We cannot do anything about the past except learn from it. The question should be “Where will our new decisions take us from here?” Shakespeare showed great insight when he said “what’s past is prologue; what to come, in yours and my discharge.” (*The Tempest*, Act II, Scene I) In this quotation he combines the belief that we must live in the present rather than the past, with an equally strong belief that you and I must take responsibility for the decisions that will lead us into the future. “Prologue” as used in the Shakespeare quotation does not mean that the past is unimportant to the present and future. On the contrary, the past trains and prepares us for each new step. Any two people in the same location, making the same decision at the same time, will be different in their preparation to carry out that decision because of the variations in their past training and experiences.

This book is essentially non-mathematical in nature. It has very little in common with texts analyzing statistically or mathematically modeled preferred outcomes in well-defined objective situations. Some mathematical terms

and principles are used, but the basic theorem is that most decision situations are primarily subjective in nature and do not have a single well-defined preferred outcome. “Subjective” should not imply that there is no clear solution to a decision problem situation, but only that life is complicated and full of variables. You will learn principles that will assist you to determine the preferred decision in your subjective circumstances. It is very important for you to learn how to make good decisions because your decisions will make your future.

Chapter 2

Difficulties in Making Decisions

Some people seem to have an inherent inability to make decisions quickly.

They tend to fear the consequences of a bad decision to the point that they feel that any choice is bad. In some cases this inability to decide is due to the emotional makeup of the individual, and in other cases it is due to that person having had bad experiences with past decisions. Hopefully, the tools presented in this book will simplify the decision-making process for such a person.

Even people who are not burdened with a tendency toward indecisiveness will frequently have problems making decisions. One reason for this may be that the arguments for and against a particular decision may be essentially of equal value. Many people do not want to make a decision unless the arguments on one side of the matter are overwhelming as com-

pared to the arguments on the other side. Such people dread the necessity of making a decision in a “close call” situation. They are not well suited to being umpires, referees, or judges.

A third group of people having trouble with making decisions includes those individuals who have difficulty accepting responsibility. Such people want to go along with others in a group rather than making a decision that might change the direction of the group for better or for worse. An individual of this type does not even want to take responsibility for the correctness of a decision that will affect only him or her.

A fourth type of person having trouble making decisions is closely related to the previous type. This person has a very high respect for authority and wants the authority figure to make all the decisions. Such individuals are very dependent and would have difficulty living in isolation from others.

There are also some people who have difficulties with choices because they are like squirrels. Squirrels can make a quick decision when they are crossing a street and see a car approaching. Their problem is that it is always the same decision. Squirrels appear to be programmed to always retreat and go back to their starting side of the street whenever they see a car coming, even when they have plenty of time to complete their crossing. Similarly, there are people who will always go back to the *status quo* whenever they are about to make a decision, and they see complications coming. In both cases the decision-maker is too tentative

to complete the action in the face of possible adversity. In the words of the song Reviewing the Situation from the musical, *Oliver*, they are telling themselves “...I think I’d better think it out again!”

Most people with decision difficulties belong to more than one of the foregoing groups. They are a combination of types, and may have additional factors that make decisions hard for them. Some people having none of the described traits may also have problems making decisions. In such cases the problem may be due to stress, the need to make many decisions simultaneously, or rapid variations in factors that are guides toward making wise choices. In a situation where many decisions need to be made, each decision may lead to changes in the factors which affect other decisions, and timing deadlines may make analysis even more difficult.

The point of this chapter is that there are many reasons why some people always tend to vacillate between alternatives when making decisions, and why everyone has such an indecision problem at some time. In the next chapter we will start to develop tools that will make decisions easier.

Chapter 3

The Subjective Nature of Decisions—Davidson's Doctrine

RReal life situations are both complex and dynamic. They do not lend themselves to rigorous mathematical analysis because there are too many variable factors and because people think and react in unpredictable ways. In such an environment a particular stimulus or cause will not always produce the same effect. Thus, we have to describe our environment as requiring subjective analysis rather than objective analysis in order to reach most decisions. Further, we rarely have the luxury of making single infrequent decisions. While some decisions are of much higher importance than others we have to make them rapidly, and we have to consider the effects of our decisions on other people.

If almost all situations are subjective, that means that they appear differently to the vari-

ous people who observe them. We have all read reports of multiple witnesses to an accident reporting significantly different versions of what happened and greatly different descriptions of the individuals and cars that were involved. Given such difference among the viewpoints of various people, how can we possibly reach decisions which will please everyone who is involved and which will appear to everyone to be correct? The initial answer is that we cannot and should not attempt to please everybody. The key to making a good decision is that it should be acceptable to you at the time you make it. If the result of that first decision is that it leads to new problems that must be resolved, remember that you can always make another decision at that point. Decisions are made to achieve a goal, but as decisions are made, new goals are developed, and new decisions are required. Decision-making is a never-ending process. Taking the first step by making the first decision overcomes the inertia of the *status quo* and starts the process rather than the event of decision-making. You make decisions of varying magnitude every day, and you will continue to do so throughout your life. The important thing is to understand the process of decision-making so that choices become routine steps along your journey through life rather than major obstacles.

You are the key to the process. The most important characteristic of any decision is that you should be comfortable with the outcomes that result from it. This must be true even though those outcomes will arise at some time

in the future. How then can you make a wise decision now and feel comfortable with consequences that will not become evident until the future?

The answer to this question lies in an approach that I call Davidson's Doctrine:

Whenever you have to decide between two alternatives or among several alternatives, select one choice, and assume that you have already made that decision. Then look at your situation from the viewpoint of having already made the decision, and see whether you are comfortable with it and its probable resulting implications. Convert the assumed decision to an actual one only after you feel comfortable with all aspects of the assumed choice. If you find that you are not comfortable with the expected outcomes of the assumed decision, choose another alternative, and repeat the self-questioning to determine whether you are comfortable with the implications of that new decision.

In practice, this doctrine is easy to apply, but it requires some explanation and examples. Once you assume that you have made a particular decision, you move beyond it in order to find out whether you are comfortable with it. You should feel comfortable with your assumed decision by whatever criteria are important to you. Different people will have varying needs that they will want satisfied before proceeding to a real decision. You might ask yourself questions like:

- Now that I have (*assumed that I have*) made this decision, what do I have to do to follow up on it?
- How are my family and friends going to react to my decision?
- If this decision feels right to me, do I care what other people think and say about it?
- Am I ready to tell everyone about my decision?
- What is it going to cost in money, other resources, and intangible values to make this choice?
- What rewards can I expect from this decision?
- Am I ready to go beyond assuming that I have made this decision and actually make it?

You may find that it is helpful to go beyond the assumed decision and to take some minor actions based upon it to determine your level of comfort with that choice.

Example 1: When I first debated whether I should start my own business many years ago, I was working for Bell & Howell Company. I had become bothered by the amount of time that was spent in long meetings at this large company prior to making any significant decision. I was also discouraged by the attitude of many managers to avoid any step forward that might reflect poorly on the importance of their departments or their management style. They acted as though they worked for their departments rather than for the company as a whole.

At this time Bell & Howell Company was also having problems due to a product line that had old technology. I debated whether it was better to remain there and to hope for additional future advancement, or if it was better to go out on my own. As I mulled over my options, I looked at many of the small vendors we used and the people running those businesses, and I decided that I could run a business as well as they could. I didn't do anything that would change my status with the corporation, but I assumed that I was going to go out on my own. This assumption felt comfortable to me. While I continued to work for my employer, I took the preliminary steps of joining a workshop on starting a small business; working out a name, logo, and set of objectives for the business, and meeting with an attorney to begin the incorporation procedure. I also had some business cards and letterhead printed to give the new business a visible identity. None of these steps were costly, and they took me far enough down this new path to let me know that I was comfortable with it. I started to work on a first product in the evenings, and left Bell & Howell only after I felt that the product would be viable when completed, but before it was developed to the point where they might assert a claim on it. My new company was incorporated on April 30th, and I resigned from Bell & Howell on June 1st of that year.

Example 2: The first car I owned was a 1956 Chevy Bel Air convertible.

I loved that car, and in recent years I have repeatedly thought that I would buy one on the

classic car market if I could get one. I made the assumption that I had decided to buy one, and followed up this assumption by looking for similar cars at antique car shows and museums. After a period of this assumed shopping, I decided that I was not comfortable with the prospect of buying that car, and I rid myself of that temptation permanently. I had realized that I did not have the large amount of money that I would have needed to spend on it; I did not have a good place to keep it; and I was quite satisfied to just see similar cars occasionally at car shows and museums. I had also developed a recurring dream that I had purchased my car and that it had been stolen. After the ninth or tenth time of dreaming that I had lost my prized possession to a thief, I decided that I was not destined to own that classic car. As a much less costly alternative, I purchased an original repair manual for the car online; had my picture taken next to a museum car; and surrounded myself with miniature models of it. My assumed decision had taken me through the process and relieved me of my unsatisfied desire.

Whether the result of the assumed decision is to make it a permanent choice or to turn to an alternative action, you will learn something about yourself during the process, and it won't cost you anything significant to find out whether you are comfortable with the assumed decision. This approach gives you the opportunity to learn from your mistakes before you make them. In a sense it is like seeing into the future or having 20-20 foresight. In some cases

the consequences of an assumed decision that you avoid by realizing your discomfort may be very significant, as in the case of avoiding a marriage to an incompatible spouse or of making an impractical or unethical business move. When you do decide to proceed with the assumed decision, you have already rehearsed it and reviewed its various implications, so the actual implementation of the decision will be easier for you than if you were acting on a snap judgement. When you go through the assumed decision process you are effectively going through a procedure to formalize the old adage of sleeping on a problem before taking action to resolve it.

Learning from assumed decisions can also be valuable when minor choices are required. For example, if you tell yourself that you would like to enter a long-distance race and start practicing in the rigorous way which would be required, you will soon discover whether or not you are comfortable with the burden of regular training. The important point is that you will learn your degree of comfort with the decision without having made a formal commitment to the race organization or to your friends and family. Another benefit of assuming that you have made a decision before you actually make it is that you will have time to consider the effects of that decision on others before it becomes a commitment. This makes the assumed decision a diplomatically sound and considerate process. You have the opportunity to learn whether you are comfortable with it before you

potentially hurt someone else's feelings or embarrass yourself.

Applying Davidson's Doctrine:

Assume that you have made a decision to run for public office. What preliminary steps would you take to decide whether you would be comfortable with this decision? Are you comfortable with the impact that this decision would have on those with whom you have relationships? Does the effort required feel worthwhile in order to achieve your objective? How would you go about raising money and determining how much money you would need? How would you react if your opponent used dirty campaign tactics against you? Would you feel comfortable serving in that office if you were elected? What would be the impact of that election on your family, friends, and business activities? How would you feel if you lost the election?—You should be able to get a feeling for the steps involved in the assumed decision process from this example. Without getting anyone else prematurely involved, you should soon know whether you are comfortable with this choice.