



CENTERSTONE

Wellness Program

Life Choices: Five ways to make tough decisions

Sometimes we come to forks in the road that call for us to make difficult or perhaps drastic decisions. Our goals change, and we have varied priorities in different phases of our lives. These decisions can impact all areas of our lives, including the lives of those around us. I'm not talking about the dilemma of what to name the dog or which shower curtain to buy, but rather points in time where we have to discern opportunity from risk. Examples include decisions about a career change, moving, buying or selling a house, ending or beginning a relationship, placing loved ones in a full-time care facility, adopting a child or retirement.

Wow! Just pondering those examples can bring thoughts of tension and confusion and even bit of relief as well – assuming the positives will surely outweigh any negatives. These life choices demand careful consideration. Here are five suggestions to help you make tough decisions:

Look beyond the moment

A sure sign of immaturity is to make choices only with the present moment in mind. Tough decisions require looking not only at an immediate gain from a particular choice but also considering its potential long term benefits. Sometimes we have to pay a small price in the short term, but the long term gains far outweigh the immediate sacrifices. Think of a child with a fist full of allowance money who wisely opts to save his money to purchase a bike, as opposed to buying candy or videos whenever the urge strikes. The same principle applies to adults managing the temptations of daily desires versus achieving long term goals. The moment will pass, but will you still be confident in your choice next week, or next year?

Evaluate a “head choice” versus a “heart choice”

A “head choice” is a decision that makes a lot of sense on paper. A “heart choice” is one that speaks to your soul and meets a need or longing. Heart choices envelope your passion and emotion. Often, these choices are made without careful consideration because it feels good at the time and brings an emotional high, albeit short-lived. A bad relationship mistake can be made overnight because you only thought of the short-term benefits. Yet, someone who chooses a spouse from the “head choice” perspective *alone* aims to check off certain traits and ideals from a list and overlooks the importance of an emotional or spiritual bond. The best decisions often have both emotional rewards and make rational sense as well.

Consider if you could you survive if disappointed

Once you decide which path to take and you pursue it with all your might, what if you realize that you made a mistake? Can you survive even if you feel like you failed? It is important to weigh the cost of failure, and not just the financial cost, but the emotional devastation and the time and energy lost. While some disappointment comes with many decisions we make, it is important to assess our resiliency and coping skills when things don't work out the way we had hoped. If you choose a path that would annihilate you if its outcome were unsuccessful, it is probably not a wise choice. Think through the “what if” questions before taking the plunge forward.

Respect the effect and influence of others

Take into account how your decision will affect those around you, particularly family members or close friends or associates who could be impacted. A single person typically has more flexibility to make a major life change,

whereas a family needs to factor in other risks (or rewards) and consider the household impact. For example, a husband who is debating accepting a job that requires moving to another state should also think of the challenges that relocation may bring for his spouse and children as they would have to uproot and depart their current lifestyle and activities. Some major life choices can be awesome opportunities and bring much reward and blessings – but only in the context of the timing of the choice.

Go with what you know

While we can never have all the answers surrounding our options, we can do some serious research into picking the best option. Decisions should not be made solely on hopes, wishes, dreams and potential, but also on facts that can support the choice, if possible. Are you financially stable enough to recover if you chose one decision over another? Is there evidence that others have gained much from making a similar choice? And, will you be able to look back on the decision with confidence that you made the best decision with the information you had? Sometimes life calls for tough choices, and that's OK. You can survive. You can go with what you know to help you make important decisions.

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About Centerstone

Centerstone (www.centerstone.org), a not-for-profit organization is the nation's largest provider of community-based behavioral healthcare. With a history that spans over fifty years, Centerstone provides a full range of behavioral health and related educational services to more than 64,000 individuals of all ages and their families annually. Children, adolescents, adults, seniors, and families all receive help from a multitude of different programs in more than 120 facilities and 150 partnership locations in Tennessee and Indiana. Centerstone is accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF) in Tennessee and The Joint Commission in Indiana. For more information about Centerstone, please call toll free at (888) 291-4357.

About Susan Gillpatrick, MEd, LPC, CTS

Susan Gillpatrick, Centerstone Crisis Management Specialist, primarily works in the field with clients in critical incident response situations, and in Centerstone's wellness trainings and presentations. She is also responsible for planning and implementing marketing and growth strategies for Centerstone's Crisis Management Strategies.

In recent years, Ms. Gillpatrick worked for the Shelby County Government Victims Assistance Center in Memphis. There, she co-developed a model program for the state of Tennessee entitled, "Homicide Response." Her work in this area received the 2000 Achievement Award from the National Association of Counties.

Ms. Gillpatrick is a Licensed Professional Counselor, Certified Trauma Specialist, Certified Workplace Conflict Mediator, and Mental Health Service Provider in the state of Tennessee and a National Certified Counselor. She is also a member the American Counseling Association, the Association of Traumatic Stress Specialists, the Tennessee Mental Health Counseling Association, and the Middle Tennessee Employee Assistance Professionals Association. She is a frequent presenter at local and national conferences, and has had numerous articles published. She received her Master of Education degree in Human Development Counseling from Peabody College at Vanderbilt University.