

Enthusiasm as a helpful tool to making effective decisions.

When I first learned about decision making, I learned that “good” decisions were made by gathering all the facts, weighing all the pro’s and con’s before finally coming to a decision – a time consuming, laborious mental process! It’s not surprising that every time I would approach a decision my heart would sink. I’m not detail oriented and that kind of approach seemed to require an awful lot attention to detail. Now my friend Elizabeth is wonderful at this kind of approach. She loves to research and get all the information. We affectionately call her data lady. If I need to know what the best product to use is I go straight to her because I know she will have done her homework thoroughly. She has the willingness, enthusiasm and commitment to take this approach.

What about those of us who do not find that this approach comes naturally. How then do we make effective decisions? In this world of exploding technology and the internet we are faced with more and more choices and options and consequently more decisions. Some decisions are simple decisions like “Should I have eggs and bacon or cereal for breakfast?” Others are multi phased decisions like, “Do I take that job or do I get married to ...?” These complex decisions are the ones that call for a more elaborate strategy.

Given my training, I had a lot of judgment about my lack of adequate research when making a decision. Yet as I look back over my life I feel pretty good about the overall choices and decisions I have made. Even though I haven’t always done the research one would normally think to do on huge life changing decisions, somehow they were good decisions. How is that so? As I look more closely at the specific decisions I have made, I realize that I have unconsciously applied a decision making strategy that has proven to be very effective. It is seen in the following example.

Shortly after I arrived in America from South Africa I had this strong desire to do my Masters Degree. At the time I was in this country on a visitor’s visa unable to earn an income. As you can imagine completing a Masters Degree requires many thousands of dollars, which I did not have. Initially I attempted to put this idea aside, yet was unable to do so. Every time I thought of getting my masters I felt this tremendous sense of excitement and enthusiasm. So I took the next step.

I had identified the program and the university that I wished to attend. With trepidation I called the Dean of Admissions and told him I was interested in the degree but I had no idea how I would pay for it given my circumstances. To my relief he was highly empathetic and informed me that the school had a scholarship fund that if successful would pay for half my tuition for the first year. This was great yet I was aware that even if I received the scholarship I would still have to find the remainder of the fees. My commitment and enthusiasm gave me the energy to push through my doubting times.

I decided to focus on being admitted and finding the money to get me through the first month. I did all I needed to do with respect to my application and then focused on finding the money for the first month of classes. Through a series of chance opportunities I was able to come up with the first month’s fees. I found someone who was willing to sell me their books at a much reduced

rate and wonder of wonders I managed to attend my first weekend of classes. For the next year I attended every class, always managing to pay my fees on time.

The following year my financial situation changed as I was then legal to work and the completion of my degree proceeded with relative ease. On hind sight if I had of known what it would take, I probably would have felt too daunted to have even tried. Anyone looking from the outside may have thought I had made an irresponsible, illogical decision given the facts. Fortunately I was not using facts alone to make my decision. While they were a significant factor, my level of enthusiasm and commitment weighed more heavily to the decision. The key elements used in my decision to get my masters degree in the face of all those obstacles where:

1. The information at hand.
2. The sense of enthusiasm and energy I had toward the decision.
3. Staying present to completing the very next step (holding to the credo “It’s a cinch by the inch, it’s hard by the yard”)
4. The commitment I had to complete what I had started.

I believe these last three elements – enthusiasm, focus on the next step and commitment - are key to any good decision, regardless of how much research is or is not done. When I have a decision to make, I look at each of my options and notice my level of enthusiasm. If a particular choice seems the most logical but I have no enthusiasm for it, I have learned not to override my enthusiasm monitor. When I do I find that I have no extra energy or commitment to carry me through when obstacles are met, as they invariably are on any path to a goal.

I believe that my enthusiasm is tied to my intuition or unconscious knowing of what is a good or bad decision for me. The better the decision the stronger my enthusiasm. This enthusiasm is not a flash in the pan type of “good feeling”. It is a deep strong sustaining inner sense that gives me the energy to do what it takes. My enthusiasm is very closely tied to my sense of commitment. The higher my enthusiasm the easier it is to keep my commitment alive. I believe we all have this “enthusiasm monitor”. Just like any other muscle in our body, the more we use it the stronger and more reliable it becomes.