

# Fear and Decision Making: Do it YOUR Way!

By Glynis Ferguson

People come to me as a life coach for all kinds of reasons. Some say they want less stress in their life; some long for better relationships; some feel unfulfilled, thinking that there is something missing in life. Others think that their career is going nowhere...some want more passion...some simply feel stuck. In coaching my clients to become aware of the emotional fears that keep them small and prevent them from realizing their potential, one subject that frequently comes up is the fear of making decisions.

What is scary about making decisions? Is it fear of making a mistake, fear of displeasing someone, fear of utter failure?

How do you go about making decisions? Do you use your head, your heart, your intuition, or a combination of all three? Do you do what you think you "should" do? Do you look for someone else's approval or endorsement? What is your process?

Avoiding making decisions allows us to avoid taking responsibility for creating the life we want. Fear of the unknown and thinking about consequences often keeps us stuck, and we procrastinate.

Symptoms of fear can show us what we are avoiding. It can be helpful to look at the personal manifestations of that fear in your own life. Listen to your mental chatter. How much do you make decisions on the basis of what you think you "should" or "must" do? Examine your expectations of yourself and the expectations you believe others have of you. When we make a choice based on a sense of obligation, it often results in feelings of resentment and disappointment. So instead, ask yourself, "What do I want?" And be truthful with your answer!

Do you hear yourself making excuses? Our excuses are often based on facts and, consequently, can be hard to dismiss. We use excuses to justify why we don't have what we say we want. Who would you be

without your excuse? What choice would you make without it?

Be cognizant of your complaining. Complaining keeps us stuck. Complaining exacerbates any challenge by focusing on what is wrong in life, rather than focusing on taking actions to solve it, or accepting the situation and finding peace with it. When we complain, we view the world as being against us. We can blame others and see ourselves as victims; the benefit is we get to avoid personal responsibility.

## Listen to your self-talk

What we tell ourselves about a situation largely determines our mood and feelings.

If you say, "What if..." you may feel paralyzed when it comes to making decisions. People who worry often imagine the worst, or overestimate the odds of something bad or embarrassing happening, or they anticipate failure. Negative self-talk often results in avoiding, and when we continue to avoid, we worry more, and so the circle goes round.

If you think that you won't do something well, you might tell yourself you can't do it, or you might hear yourself say, "I'll never be able to..." Question how much you are playing the role of victim. The victim in us can have us feeling helpless or hopeless, can have us complaining or regretting, and often results in a belief that nothing will ever change.

If you hear yourself saying, "I should," "I must," or "I have to," question whether it's just the perfectionist in you goading you to do better, telling you that you must do more, achieve this or that.

## Fear can show up in our body when we are uncomfortable making a choice:

as confusion, stomach problems, inability to sleep, feelings of paralysis, and many other ways. One thing is for sure:

whenever we feel confused, our head and heart are out of alignment.

When Lay Hui came to me for coaching, she told me she knew she wanted to change her life but felt stuck. She had been managing the family business, a leather goods business, since her father got sick 10 years ago. She was his only child; her mother had died when Lay Hui was 8 years old. Now 38, she still lived at home with her father, taking care of him.

Lay Hui worked hard in the family business, and it provided her with a comfortable standard of living, yet she felt tired and wanted more. I asked her what she meant by "more." She said that she dreamed of traveling, exploring the world. In particular she wanted to learn about different Mediterranean foods, to be taught what is handed down by different generations, and perhaps become a food writer. She dreamed of living in Greece, sitting on the rooftop of a beautiful white home overlooking the gorgeous, clear, calm, blue sea. Here, she dreamed that she'd feel content with all she could wish for, and would have a partner by her side.

Lay Hui told me that she felt confused. So I asked her to get into her head AND her heart. I asked her about her priorities in life, her commitments, her values, and her needs. She valued family, she told me, and felt a strong sense of responsibility to take care of her father. She also valued friendship, financial security, integrity, and personal strength. I asked her if these values were her own, or her father's. Often we take on the beliefs of our parents and teachers without reflecting whether they work for us. I asked Lay Hui to reflect again. What she learned was that, yes, she did value personal responsibility, yet she was not always responsible to herself. She learned, too, that she valued a spirit of adventure, having fun, and being playful. (She hadn't had much of a childhood.) She wanted to travel, to fall in love, to have more fun, to do things for herself, to



delight in life. But her fear told her it was selfish to think like this.

Lay Hui was considering traveling to Europe for two months. A friend, a travel journalist, had invited her to join her on a trip; this had prompted Lay Hui to think about what she wanted to do with her life. She worried about who would take care of her father, what would happen if....

I encouraged Lay Hui to take things one step at a time, to contemplate her options, and to consider what might be the cost/benefit of each. In particular, for each choice, I wanted to know what might be the likely impact on her health and well-being, her family, her relationships, her finances, and her future and higher potential. How did she feel about each option? If she were to imagine making each choice—living with it for a day—how would she feel? Specifically, would she feel empowered or disempowered? When she thinks of this choice, how much, on a scale of one to ten, does she feel fully alive? What did her intuition tell her to do? Could she even hear her intuition? Was she someone who had the courage to act on her intuition? Many of us hear our intuition but fail to act, because most times our intuition does not tell us how to do it, but rather just to do it. What would she do if she were true to herself?

Lay Hui was confused because she was challenged to separate her expectations

and sense of responsibility towards the family business and her father from her own needs and desires. Within the business, she expected herself to do things her father's way and was unable to be herself. Yet, her fear of being selfish had her feeling guilty for having her own wants and needs. As long as she was doing what she thought she "should" be doing, she was ignoring her own dreams. Lay Hui realized that she was tired of being told what to do; she told me that she wanted to put herself first, and she wanted to do things her way!

### **If you feel stuck on a decision, here are some tips:**

**To make a choice that is true to yourself, trust your intuition, honor your feelings, and act on your commitments.** Learn to hear the difference between your voice of fear and your voice of intuition.

**Ask, "What do I want?" Don't think about how you're going to get it done.** When you are clear about the what, the how will take care of itself.

Get creative when it comes to choices—it needn't always be black and white, either/or.

**Give yourself permission to make mistakes.** People who succeed are the people who are willing to make mistakes again and again. You only fail when you take no action.

**Risk.** By learning to take risks, you

grow as an individual. Your confidence and self-esteem will increase, and more importantly, you will learn how to count on yourself.

**Trust yourself.** Make your decision, think about what you can and can't control, focus on an intention, do your best, and then let go. Trust the process.

**When we're not being true to ourselves, we can spend time and effort trying to control things and people over which we have no control.** When we're true to ourselves, we put 100% commitment into what we can control. When we feel passionate about what we are doing, we find the discipline to do what we need to do.

**Act!** And, when you follow through, think about which of your qualities to tap into for support. Do you need to be more courageous, loving, accountable, trusting? Do you need to learn to persevere?

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