

Do You Choose How You Make Choices?

BY CANDY TYMSON CSP

Have you ever thought about how powerful choice is?

Making choices is part of just about everything we do—from choosing to stay in bed just a little bit longer after the alarm has gone off, or choosing to get up early, put on our running shoes and head out in the cold, early dawn. Both choices create different outcomes, wouldn't you agree? So why do we choose one, over the other?

Psychologist William Glasser found that all behaviour represents the individual's constant attempt to satisfy one or more of five basic needs; and that our choices represent what we believe most satisfies our needs at that time.

Satisfying Basic Needs

These basic needs are:

- a) the need to survive
- b) the need to belong
- c) the need to gain power
- d) the need to be free
- e) the need to have fun

I was at a major conference recently for a national firm of consultants, a total of over one hundred partners. The mood was initially cynical and frustrated—the firm had been undergoing major change over several years and with the organisation growing so large, the partners generally felt disenfranchised. It became clear that many of their basic needs—belonging, having power, feeling free and having fun, were not being met.

I watched in wonder as the mood changed quite dramatically over two days. So what happened? Glasser states the need to belong is fulfilled by loving, sharing and co-operating with others. At the conference this was achieved by providing a low-key program with plenty of time for mixing, sharing and yes, bonding. As people got to know each other better, their level of respect for each other, and the firm, increased.

The need for power is fulfilled by achieving, accomplishing and being recognised and respected. I saw this happen first hand at their inaugural Awards Night where the partners of each state office were asked to nominate a partner who best reflected each of the four values of the firm. Staff was asked to do the same. (No prizes for guessing that the list from the partners and the list from their staff were different!) The overall winning partner, in each category, was acknowledged and presented with a gift. They also created a 'Hall of Fame' and honoured those partners who had been with the firm for more than thirty years—again creating respect and acknowledgement.

The need for fun, which is met by laughing and playing, was also met over the two days, as was the need for freedom, which is fulfilled by the choices offered.

Taking Responsibility for our Choices

My father-in-law was a fine gentleman, with a great attitude. I remember one day seeing him sitting at his

desk, paying a pile of bills, while he whistled a happy tune. I was surprised, after all who really is happy about paying bills! His response was: "well the bills have to be paid, I can't control that, but I can choose what mood I want to be in while I pay them".

There are various strategies we can use to avoid making choices—I wonder how many of them you recognise from your own behaviour? (I must confess, I've been guilty of them all over the years!)

We Avoid Choice by:

- Only choosing what seems easily attainable, rather than what we really want.
- Choosing the process, rather than the result.
- Eliminating all other choices so that only one choice remains.
- Not choosing to choose therefore choosing by default.

Looking at Options and Consequences

So how do we motivate ourselves (and those who work with us) to make a choice? A simple method is to ask the following questions:

What are the five consequences if I choose to (make a change)?

What are the five consequences if I choose to do nothing?

Many of us are reluctant to take responsibility for our choices, desires and fears. There is a tendency to blame others for our situation and this can result in the feeling of being powerless, and behaving in a way that can be seen as weak and passive.

Many years ago I meet a young woman who was passionate about wanting to work for a particular company. She sent off a standard application and received no reply. That was it. She took no further action but instead whinged and complained about the company, and then became resigned to the fact she would never work for them.

In contrast I also know a young woman who was passionate about working for Chanel. Although she had a degree, the only job she could get with them was as a shop assistant—she took it, with her eye clearly on her goal to one-day work in their marketing department. A choice that paid off as some years later she now works in the marketing department of Chanel, in Paris.

The choices you make not only affect the course your life takes, but also impact on how fulfilled you feel. What do you choose for yourself in 2007?



CANDY TYMSON

Candy Tymson is an expert in business communications with a Master's Degree in Human Resource Management and Coaching. Based in Sydney, she is a professional speaker, facilitator and business coach, and author of *Gender Games: Doing Business With The Opposite Sex*. For information on her workshops, presentations and products:

Phone: 02 9976 6777
 Fax: 02 9976 6788
 Email: candy@tymson.com.au
 Website: www.tymson.com.au

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