

waste their clicks on the “reincarnating” door, even though its disappearance had no real consequences and could always be easily reversed. They just couldn’t tolerate the idea of the loss, and so they did whatever was necessary to prevent their doors from closing.

HOW CAN WE unshackle ourselves from this irrational impulse to chase worthless options? In 1941 the philosopher Erich Fromm wrote a book called *Escape from Freedom*. In a modern democracy, he said, people are beset not by a lack of opportunity, but by a dizzying abundance of it. In our modern society this is emphatically so. We are continually reminded that we can do anything and be anything we want to be. The problem is in living up to this dream. We must develop ourselves in every way possible; must taste every aspect of life; must make sure that of the 1,000 things to see before dying, we have not stopped at number 999. But then comes a problem—are we spreading ourselves too thin? The temptation Fromm was describing, I believe, is what we saw as we watched our participants racing from one door to another.

Running from door to door is a strange enough human activity. But even stranger is our compulsion to chase after doors of little worth—opportunities that are nearly dead, or that hold little interest for us. My student Dana, for instance, had already concluded that one of her suitors was most likely a lost cause. Then why did she jeopardize her relationship with the other man by continuing to nourish the wilting relationship with the less appealing romantic partner? Similarly, how many times have we bought something on sale not because we really needed it but because by the end of the sale