

Lesson 37 – Talking about Decisions

Conversation #1 – Making a difficult decision

Susan asks her friend Camilla for relationship advice. Listen to their conversation:

Susan: Camilla, you've got to help me out. I'm really in a quandary.

Camilla: What's going on?

Susan: Well, you know I've been with my boyfriend Alex for almost three years. I think he's going to ask me to marry him... but I don't want to rush into anything.

Camilla: I don't think you're rushing - three years is plenty of time to make up your mind about whether or not the relationship is working.

Susan: But the problem is that I still want to travel and have all these adventures... and Alex, well, he's a great guy but he's a bit boring.

Camilla: In that case, it's a no-brainer - you don't want spend the rest of your life with someone who doesn't share your dreams!

Susan: Is that a good reason to break up, though? I mean, everything else about our relationship is fine. Looking at the big picture, he'd be a wonderful husband and father.

Camilla: It's a tough call. I've been torn between a relationship and a good career opportunity before, and it's not an easy decision.

Susan: So what did you end up choosing?

Camilla: I weighed up all the pros and cons, and eventually I decided to take the job offer - and end the relationship. It was the right choice, but I definitely gave it a lot of thought.

Susan: Yeah. I'm toying with the idea of taking a trip so that I can just get away for a while and reflect. I'd like to reach a decision before he proposes!

Conversation Vocabulary & Phrases

If a decision is difficult, we can say:

- **"It's a difficult/hard decision."**
- **"It's a tough call."** (*informal*)
- **"I'm in a quandary."**
- **"I've got a real dilemma."**

This phrase is often used for a situation in which both options are bad, and there really is no good choice.

One idiom for an easy decision is **"a no-brainer"** – this means a decision that is so easy, you don't even have to think about it. For example, "There was an 80% discount on that computer – so buying it was a no-brainer!"

Here are a few phrases to use when you're **undecided** – you can't decide what to do:

- **"I can't make up my mind."**
- **"I'm in two minds about..."**
- **"I'm torn between... (option A and option B)."**

This phrase is often used for especially emotionally intense decisions.

- **"I'm undecided."**
- **"I'm on the fence."**
- **"I'm at a crossroads."**

This phrase is used for decisions that will have a major effect on your future – when you have to choose between two different directions in life.

A vocabulary tip: be careful not to confuse the words **"undecided"** and **"indecisive."** A person who is **undecided** is someone who has not yet made a decision about a specific choice. For example, "I don't know who I'm going to vote for yet – I'm undecided." The word "undecided" refers to a *temporary situation*.

The word "indecisive" refers to a *general/permanent* part of someone's personality. A person who is **indecisive** is someone who, in general, has lots of difficulty making decisions. The person takes a long time to decide, and/or frequently changes their decisions. For example, "My sister is so indecisive – every morning, she spends two hours trying to choose what clothes to wear."

With important decisions, you often need to take some time to think so that you don't make a **rash/hasty decision** (that's a decision made quickly and without sufficient consideration). Here are some phrases for delaying a decision:

- **"I don't want to rush into anything."**
Use this phrase when you are considering making a commitment.
- **"I'd like to keep my options open."**
Use this phrase when you think that a better option may appear later
- **"Let me think about it / sleep on it."**
"sleep on it" means you will make or finalize the decision tomorrow
- **"I'll take that into consideration."**
- **"We need to look at the big picture."**
This means you need to consider the entire situation, not just one aspect
- **"I'm weighing up the pros and cons."**
This means you are considering the advantages and disadvantages of each option

Sometimes people give you advice for making decisions. Some common suggestions are:

- **"Follow your heart."**
This means you should do what your emotions want
- **"Trust your instincts / gut."**
This means you should listen to your deep, natural impulse
- **"Consider the trade-offs."**
The term "trade-offs" means that if you get one thing, you will lose other things. For example, if you want to live in a tropical country, you will not be able to go skiing frequently – that is a "trade-off" because you are losing the possibility of going skiing regularly, but gaining the advantages of living in a warm climate.

Finally, we have two informal phrases for actions that you are thinking about doing, but you are not yet 100% decided:

- **"I have half a mind to... [+ verb]"**
I have half a mind to quit my job and travel around the world.
- **"I'm toying with the idea of... [+ verb-ing]"**
I'm toying with the idea of quitting my job and traveling around the world.

Conversation #2 – Evaluating a Decision

Susan and Camilla lose touch for a couple of years, and then they reconnect. Listen to them talk about the results of their past decisions.

Susan: Hi Camilla! It's been a while!

Camilla: Yeah, it's great to hear from you! How have you been?

Susan: Great - I'm traveling through Thailand right now.

Camilla: So I take it you're no longer with Alex?

("I take it" = I assume, I imagine)

Susan: No, I'm not... upon reflection, I realized that if I stayed with him, I'd always resent having to give up my dreams.

Camilla: Was it difficult?

Susan: Yes... seeing how heartbroken he was almost made me have second thoughts. But I stuck with my decision and I think it was better for both of us.

Camilla: That's good.

Susan: How about you? Did you go through with your plans to get your Master's degree?

Camilla: Actually, no, I changed my mind about that. After further consideration, I came to the conclusion that it wouldn't really help advance my career.

Susan: Oh, really?

Camilla: Yeah. It wasn't a hasty decision – far from it. I did a lot of research and talked to a few people who had been through the program, and they said it wasn't really worth the investment of time and money.

Susan: I guess hindsight is 20-20.

Conversation Vocabulary and Phrases

When you make a decision after lots of thought or time, you can say:

- "I've reached a decision."
- "I've come to a decision."

If you continue with your decision, then we say you **stick with your decision** or **stand by your decision**. But if you begin to think that your decision wasn't good, then you can say:

- **"I'm having second thoughts."**

This expression is usually used to talk about doubting a decision when there is still time to change it. For example, "My son's studying chemistry in college – but now he's having second thoughts. He might change his major to biology instead."

Use these phrases to talk about changing a decision:

- **"I changed my mind."**
This is the most basic and common way to talk about changing a thought/decision
- **"Upon reflection... / After further consideration..."**
Use these phrases to show that you thought carefully about the issue before changing your decision. "Upon reflection..." is typically used for individual decisions, and "After further consideration..." is often used in more formal/business situations.
- **"He convinced/persuaded me to..."**
Say this when someone else influenced your decision, or influenced you to change your mind.

At the end of the conversation, Susan uses an expression to reflect on a past decision: **"Hindsight is 20-20."** This phrase means, "You can only evaluate whether a decision was right or wrong after some time has passed and you can see the results." This expression is usually used when someone made a decision which they later realized was "wrong" or not the best choice.

Another phrase used for evaluating a bad decision in the past is: **"I'm not sure what I was thinking."** For example, "I'm not sure what I was thinking when I decided to move so far away from home. Now I really miss my family."

What about some phrases for saying a decision was good? You can say:

- **"Looking back, I know it was the right decision."**
"looking back" means you are remembering the past

- **“Ultimately, it was the right choice.”**
“ultimately” means “in the end” or “after considering everything”
- **“Everything worked out for the best.”**
Use this phrase when there were some problems/challenges after the decision, but in the end they were all resolved and the final result was good.

You’ve finished Lesson 37! Today’s speaking task is to describe an important decision you’ve had to make in your life. Use some of the vocabulary from this lesson to talk about the process of making the decision and its results.

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