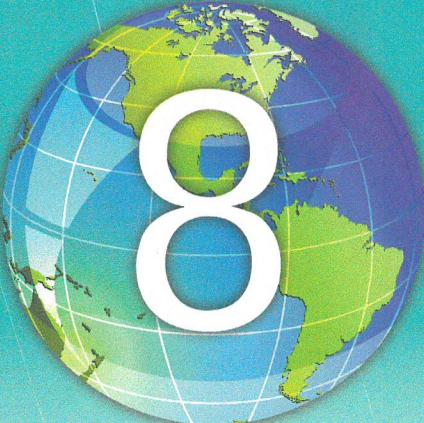


Developing Your Decision Making

Strategize Your Game Plan



STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

At the end of the chapter you will be able to ...

- Describe and explore your own decision-making process.
- Apply the principles of decision making to your goals and objectives.
- Set and manage financial goals.
- Define and use stress management techniques.
- Make educational and training choices.

Career decisions are the Olympic trials of your career fitness program. They give you an opportunity to integrate and test out all the components of your career fitness program—your attitudes, values, skills, interests, and biases. For most of us, it is safe to assume that whatever decisions are made are the best, given the information, circumstances, and feelings of the moment. However, you can improve your decision-making performance by examining some of the assumptions and strategies that other people have used in the decision-making process. This chapter reviews decision-making strategies that are potentially limiting and those that are potentially empowering and success oriented. The primary focus of this chapter is to describe an effective decision-making model that involves setting realistic goals with specific time frames. They must be realistic for you, and you must affirm that you deserve and are capable of reaching these goals.

Complete the exercises as you read through this chapter. Doing so will help you test and develop your skill in using various aspects of the decision-making model as they are presented.

One comes to be
of just such stuff
as that on which
the mind is set.

—Upanishads



The Decision-Making Process

Decision making is the process of identifying and then selecting alternatives based largely on the preferences of the decision maker. There are always choices to be considered and your decision is one that best fits your goals, lifestyle, values, and past experiences.

Decisions are evaluated by their probability of success or effectiveness. You are constantly making decisions. Some are as mundane as selecting a movie or picking out a new pair of shoes. Others—like choosing a career, selecting a life partner, or deciding whether to have children—have much greater consequence.

OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO DECISION MAKING

Take time right now to think about recent decisions you have made. Even small decisions like when to get up, whether or not to exercise, what television programs to watch, what to eat, who to choose as friends, and how to spend your free time count.

Write down at least five decisions you made *this week*:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Essentially, your attitude shapes your behavior and your ability to make wise decisions. Attitudes are gut-level feelings and thoughts that guide our decision making. If you are aware of your attitudes and habits, you can enhance your daily effectiveness. If you believe you can, you can! And conversely, if you have a negative attitude, it will have an effect on your outcomes. Many people make decisions with limited knowledge or little sense of personal responsibility. They function on automatic pilot without considering the consequences. This stance may seem to simplify or accelerate the decision-making process but the results are often less than optimal. As you read the following sections, think about the process you followed in making the decisions you listed above.

DECISION-MAKING STYLES

The box below titled “Decision Making Styles” describes some of the ways people go about making decisions. Read it now, and then read “Meet Art” in the “Real Stories” feature on page 145. Try to determine what decision-making styles Art used.

Choosing a career is a *life development process*. At various points during the process, different issues must be decided. Thus, planning (the first of the styles listed) is the key to reaching

Decision-Making Styles

Planning: “Weighing the facts.” Considering values, objectives, necessary information, alternatives, and consequences; a rational approach with a balance between thinking and feeling.

Impulsive: “Don’t look before you leap.” Little thought or examination; taking the first available alternative.

Intuitive: “It feels right.” Automatic, preconscious choice based on inner harmony.

Compliant: “Anything you say.” Nonassertive; letting someone else decide; following someone else’s plans.

Delaying: “Cross that bridge later.” Procrastination, avoidance, hoping someone or something will happen to avoid making a decision, postponing thought and action.

Fatalistic: “It’s all in the cards.” What will be will be; letting the environment decide; leaving it up to fate.

Agonizing: “What if?” Worrying that a decision will be the wrong one; getting lost in all the data; overwhelmed by analyzing alternatives.

Paralytic: “Can’t face up to it.” One step further than “what if”—complete indecision and fear; accepting responsibility but being unable to act on it.

Defaulting: “Playing it safe.” Choosing the alternative with the lowest level of risk.

We often use a combination of styles that can further complicate the decision-making process.

WHAT ABOUT YOU?

1. Which of these approaches to decision making do you use most and least often?
2. Which would you like to use more often? Which would you like to avoid? Why?
3. Consider a current decision in progress (e.g., one you wrote at the beginning of this chapter). Think it through using several of these approaches. Which prove to be most useful?

your goals. It implies gaining control of your life. Typically, the planning and intuitive styles are the most effective. The others contain a hint of fear: fear of failure, fear of imperfection, fear of rejection, fear of ridicule. Such fears are based on “internal factors” related to your attitudes and self-esteem.

When you feel stuck or unable to make a decision, try asking yourself the following questions:

1. What are my assumptions (attitudes) affecting my decisions?
2. What are my feelings regarding these decisions?
3. Why am I clinging to behavior that prevents me from making this decision?
4. What further information do I need in order to generate alternatives?

What Are My Assumptions?

Many people assume that if they could only make the one right decision about the matter at hand, everything else would fall into place. In fact, most decisions do not have such power over your life. Decisions are not typically black and white in terms of their consequences; rather, they simply move you in one direction or another. Decisions open up some options and close off others. If you assume that most decisions can be changed or altered—that most decisions do not, in fact, signify life or death—then you will not be so hesitant to make a decision, act on it, assess the implications as they occur, and make adjustments (or new decisions) as necessary.

What Are My Feelings?

Some people create unnecessary stress about making decisions because they give themselves an either/or ultimatum. Neither option really feels right, but they panic and make impulsive decisions to ease the anxiety. You can become paralyzed without making any choice, allowing circumstances to decide an issue. When you are feeling pressured or paralyzed about making a decision, step back and take several deep breaths, and then begin to generate additional alternatives. A friend, counselor, or skilled listener can often help with this process. As you gain more information about your options, you will realize which decision is best for you. Other people cry over spilled milk; in other words, they think back over past decisions and lament not having decided differently. This wastes time and energy and can be destructive to the self-image. When you begin to feel self-doubt or regret about past decisions, remind yourself that you made the best decision you could, given the time, circumstances, and information available.

Why Am I Clinging to This Behavior?

Acknowledging that you are causing this indecisiveness may generate a different point of view. For example, sometimes people cling to old nonproductive behaviors because they are the safe ways to act; they don’t have to deal with the unknown or the possibility of making mistakes or taking risks. It is important to recognize when the old, comfortable ways of doing things no longer provide the payoffs they once did.

Everyone, to some degree, is a risk taker. Since there are always some unknowns to assess, risk is an essential element of the decision-making process. What has been your greatest risk? In its most basic sense, risk taking means moving from the safe and familiar to the unknown and scary. Most of us are fairly conservative risk takers in that we want the odds to be at least 50–50 before we jump in. Yet millions of people play the lottery, start businesses, and get married even when the odds are clearly not in their favor. Why? Because regardless of the probability of success (the odds), people sometimes take risks based on the *desirability* of the successful outcome.

In a lottery, the probabilities are a million to one against winning, yet people continue to gamble because of the high desirability of the positive outcome of winning. You are in the best position to take a calculated risk when you assess both the probability and desirability of an outcome and weigh it against other possible outcomes. Failure to consider outcomes in this fashion is the most common cause of unsuccessful risk taking. For example, many people are

afraid to take the risk of changing their career direction. They immediately think of the worst possible outcome: “I’ll fail” or “I will never find another job if I quit this one.” They don’t ask themselves how probable or desirable the best possible outcome would be. In many cases, the probability of their worries actually materializing (i.e., the likelihood of a highly negative outcome) is very low.

What Further Information Do I Need in Order to Generate Alternatives?

Many people paralyze themselves with this “worst possible consequence” thinking, decide not to take the risk, and consequently feel trapped. What they haven’t done is generate other possible outcomes that are more probable and more desirable. What are some of these? For the example just cited, there could be a new job that is more energizing and financially rewarding, a new career with an opportunity to grow and develop, or a chance to get retraining. The probability and desirability of these outcomes are positive; therefore the decision seems less risky. However, many people still miss opportunities because they fail to generate and assess all possible outcomes. This process often needs the assistance of another person who can help identify negative or limiting thinking, as well as some realistic and positive outcomes. Risk involves being committed to your decisions, but staying flexible in your approach, so, when choosing a college major, you might consider not only the ones listed in the catalog, but designing your own course of study (often called an individualized major.)

Complete Exercise 8.1 to explore factors that affect your current or future decisions.

EXERCISE

8.1 Factors Adversely Affecting Decisions

In this exercise you will investigate factors that may unfavorably influence decision making and determine whether any patterns are evident. On the list of five decisions you made on page 142, select your three most significant decisions. Then, using the chart that follows, indicate which of the factors influenced you in making each decision and to what extent they were present. To do this, use an X to represent decision 1, a Y for decision 2, and a Z for decision 3.

External Factors	Slightly Present	Moderately Present	Strongly Present
1. Family expectations			
2. Family responsibilities			
3. Cultural stereotypes			
4. Male/female stereotypes			
5. Survival needs			
6. Other (specify)			
Internal Factors	Slightly Present	Moderately Present	Strongly Present
1. Lack of self-confidence			
2. Fear of change			
3. Fear of making a wrong decision			
4. Fear of failure			
5. Fear of ridicule			
6. Other (specify)			

After filling in the chart, look for patterns:

1. Do you experience more internal or external obstacles when making decisions?
-
-

2. If a particular factor is "strongly present" only once, but another factor is "moderately present" in two or possibly all three of your decisions, which of the two factors do you think is more significant in affecting your decision making? Will this insight help you make a better decision?
-
-



REAL stories

Meet Art

Art was born and raised in California. When he was a child he and his family loved to hike in the mountains, surf, and scuba dive. After graduating from high school, he attended state college, where he earned a degree in graphic design. After Art had spent several fruitless months job hunting, a friend, Frank, from Ohio told him that he and his father were starting a new company, and they felt Art would fit right in. The company was going to specialize in designing packaging for educational materials and they needed someone to help with sales and develop new design concepts.

Art was very excited until he learned that they needed start-up money and wanted Art to put in a significant amount. They said that the cost of living in Ohio was less than in California, so Art could find affordable housing and insurance once he moved. Frank also promised that Art's investment would be repaid within the first two years. Art had a trust account from his grandmother that he was planning to use to return to school and get his master's degree. Without telling anyone, Art withdrew the money. The business did fairly well the first year, and Art began to make a life in Ohio. He met a girl and soon they were married. Joan was in her last year of nursing school, working part time in a nursing home, and she had excellent prospects of work after she graduated.

Six months later, Art's friend declared bankruptcy. Depressed and embarrassed, Art didn't know what to do. The job market in Ohio was not strong in Art's field, so Art and Joan decided that Art would go back to California and Joan would finish nursing school and then join him.

With only phone calls and e-mails, Joan and Art found their relationship was in trouble. Art found work, but it was not what he wanted to do and the money was barely enough to support one person. Joan graduated and was offered a good job in Ohio. She encouraged Art to come back, but he knew he could not make a good living there and he didn't want Joan to be the primary wage earner. He tried to get Joan to come to California, but she felt comfortable in Ohio and was reluctant to make the move. After three months, Joan told Art that she didn't think the marriage was going to survive and she filed for divorce.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

1. How would you evaluate Art's decision-making skills? What would you have done differently if you were Art?
2. How would you evaluate Joan's response to Art's request to move to California?
3. Were there any issues Art and Joan could have discussed before making their decision?
4. If you were Art, what research would you have done before you took the job in Ohio?
5. What strategies or resources could Joan and Art have used to save their marriage?
6. Would you use your savings on a new venture? Why or why not?

CONDITIONS FOR CHANGE

Decisions provide an opportunity to experience life in new ways, to learn and find out who you are and what you would like to do. Each path is filled with opportunities. Just imagine: By making good decisions, renewal and growth are within your reach. By engaging in affirming self-talk, positive change is possible.

It has been said that three conditions must be present to trigger change. *First, you must be dissatisfied with what is; second, you must have a concept of what would be better; and last, you must believe that there is a way to get there.* This whole process rests on the premise that the benefits of the change outweigh the costs of making the change. Affirmations help you believe that change is possible.

Conditions for Change

The following questions relate to obstacles that may be interfering with the achievement of your desires:

- How much determination do you really have if your preferred job is not readily available? How willing are you to take a reduced salary, move to a new location, or consider a new career path?
- What identity would be threatened by achieving your goal? For example, would a better job make you too independent or enable you to earn more than your mate? Would it demand more time, giving you less time as mother, husband, or partner?
- Do you secretly feel you don't deserve to attain your desires?
- Are you proving to anyone else that you can change?
- Is the work, concentration, and time worth it to you?
- Are you following all the decision-making steps suggested?
- Is it what you really want?

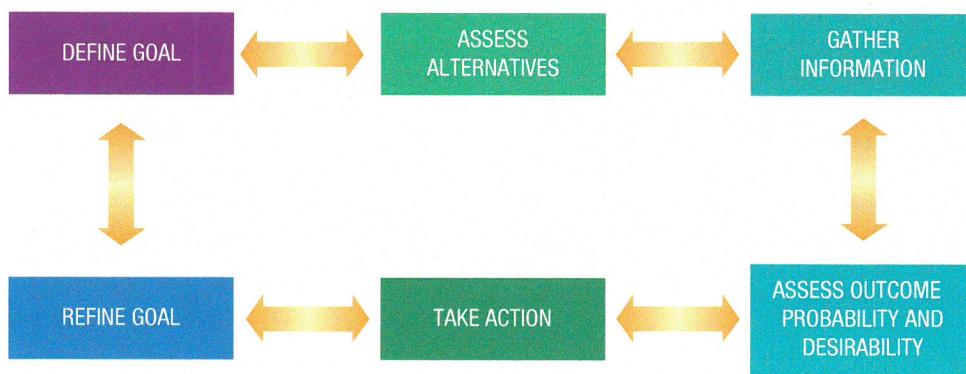


A Decision-Making Model: Your Goals and Objectives

Exhibit 8.1 offers a model for making informed decisions. The five steps necessary to make an informed and desirable decision are *defining your goal*, *assessing your alternatives*, *gathering information*, *assessing the consequences*, and *establishing your plan of action or the steps needed to achieve your goal*. Read through Exhibit 8.1 now.

EXHIBIT 8.1 Choice, Not Chance: Decisions Are in Our Power

Rational decision making uses the talents of the left brain, which is analytical and logical and deals with deductive thinking. It ideally follows the sequential, step-by-step procedure described here. Note that the arrows go in both directions to allow for new information and insights along the way.



1. Define your goal or objective.
 - Can you change part of the problem into a definite goal?
 - What do you want to accomplish by what date?
 - Can you state your objective now?
2. Assess the alternatives.
 - What are your alternatives or options?
 - Are your alternative choices consistent with your important values?
 - Can you summarize your important values in writing?
 - What is a reasonable amount of time in which to accomplish your alternatives?

3. Gather information.
 - What do you know about your alternatives?
 - What assumptions are you making that you should check out?
 - What more do you need to know about your alternatives?
 - What sources will help you gather more information about your alternatives?
 - What sources will help you discover further alternatives?
4. Assess the outcomes or consequences.
 - Probability:
What is the probability of the success of each alternative?
Are your highest values part of each alternative?
 - Desirability:
Can you eliminate the least desirable alternatives first?
When you consider the best possible alternative, how much do you want it?
What are you willing to give up in order to get what you want?
5. Establish a plan of action.
 - Weighing everything you now know about your decision, what is your plan of action?
 - What dates will you start and complete your plan of action?
 - Does your plan of action state a clear objective?
 - Does your plan of action specify the steps necessary to achieve its objective?
 - Does your plan of action specify the conditions necessary to achieve its objective?

Until you start your plan of action, you haven't really made a decision. So start now. Make systematic decision making an adventure and a habit!

RATIONAL/LINEAR DECISION MAKING

Planning is also known as the rational, or linear, approach to decision making. Decisions involve prediction. Prediction involves uncertainty. And uncertainty makes most people uncomfortable. Planning is one approach that decreases the amount of uncertainty and discomfort, and increases your chances of achieving your designated goals. You reduce the degree of uncertainty by gathering more data. The more informed you are, the better able you are to make a satisfying decision. It is critical to consider the sources before acting on the information. It is easy to access data on the Internet; it is harder to determine its validity. It is easy to listen to others' opinions; it is harder to decide whom to believe. As you make decisions and evaluate the outcomes, you will develop confidence in your own ability to assess your data sources. As part of your fact finding, consult those who will be affected by, or may have to help implement your decisions. Input from others helps supply you with information in making a decision and often provides the support necessary in the implementation phase because others are part of the decision-making process. Since it is rarely possible to gather all of the facts, the lack of complete information must not paralyze your decision. As part of your data collection, consider your feelings, hunches, and intuition. Many decisions must ultimately rely on, or be influenced by, intuition because of the uncertainty involved in any situation.

INTUITIVE DECISION MAKING

Most people use intuition as *part* of their decision-making process. Some people rely *primarily* on their intuition. Intuitive decision makers lean toward the direction that feels right. They use their right brain, which thrives on imagination and creativity and adapts to change spontaneously. These individuals feel confined when asked to write out a step-by-step process. When faced with career planning and a job search, they tend to engage in research until they have several alternatives that they believe would satisfy them equally. They like to get a feel for the overall global picture and then decide where they fit in. Once they have researched several options, talked to people in the field, and walked around the work environment, they tend to know if it's right for them. Call it intuition or a hunch, but it is based on the cumulative

insight that fits their personality. Intuitive decision makers are most apt to say they were lucky in finding the right job, the right major, or the right college. However, their luck is actually “preparation meeting opportunity.” Intuitive decision makers are highly adept at finding opportunities. They are familiar with their values, interests, skills, and personalities as they explore careers—this is why they will often say that the decision “feels right.”

Sometimes, the best approach for the intuitive decision maker is to fantasize and describe an ideal occupation or to give examples of people who have appealing careers. Intuitive people tend to be able to fantasize, daydream, and create verbal or written pictures of what they think is appealing. A collage of images glued to poster board depicting elements of a career may be as useful as the written action plan created by a rational decision maker. Intuitive decision making works for some people as well as a logical, step-by-step approach works for others. But, in fact, upon reflection, both modalities are often involved in the most satisfying decisions.

It's been said that life happens while we are making plans. That statement describes “planned happenstance” well. Even though you have analyzed the best practices in making decisions in this chapter, you must be prepared to be flexible, open, and receptive to the unexpected that may influence, detour, or derail your best laid plans. These unforeseen people and events may seem to challenge the rational decision maker more than the intuitive, but almost everyone is eventually knocked off course by a curve ball thrown in our path. One of the most unsettling surprises is a sudden layoff or job loss. Although it can and does happen to the best of us, we typically are unprepared and literally thrown off course. We usually go through the stages of loss (denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance) as described by Elizabeth Kubler-Ross; it seems like life as we know it is shattered. Yet, in retrospect, new decisions that are made have ultimately led people to a better job, situation, or life outcome after such losses. Part of this is due to conscious decisions, but synchronicity, or being at the right place at the right time, is a factor as well. Part of this may also be due to the fact that you are equally committed to several options and “happening” to find more opportunities opening for you in the second option (e.g., the perfect job is not available, but a perfect internship is).

A GOOD EXAMPLE OF A HAPPENSTANCE STORY

Go for the opportunity that opens up.

Jason completed a degree in architecture at a top university but could not find a full-time job so he enrolled in an MBA program, thinking that a career in business would be a better fit. Before he completed his coursework, his brother gifted him with a cooking class. He was complimented for his talent in the kitchen and for the first time in his life, he really enjoyed



FACTS & FIGURES

Personality/temperament studies have estimated that up to 75 percent of the population prefer and use the rational decision-making approach. These studies also suggest, therefore, that 25 percent of the population prefer to use the strategy known as intuitive. Your approach may also include aspects of negative thinking or procrastination previously discussed in this chapter. As you identify your style of decision making and your level of risk taking, it may be helpful to seek the assistance of a career counselor to help you clarify or move toward your most desirable outcome.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

1. If you are intuitive, do you feel that many people do not understand your decision-making style?

Decision Types

2. If you are intuitive, what is your biggest challenge or concern when making a decision?
3. If you feel confined when asked to write a step-by-step answer to questions in this book, what would be your alternative method to show that you understand the information you are reading?
4. If you are a rational thinker, what is your biggest challenge in making a decision?
5. If you are a rational thinker, do you prefer to make a decision and get it done, or do you find yourself procrastinating by thinking about everything over and over again?

what he was doing. He decided to complete his MBA, but while studying abroad in France, he explored the option of studying culinary arts in Paris and found his passion was there.

Back in Los Angeles, Jason got a job as a pastry chef at a well-known restaurant and decided to specialize in caramels in his confections. He continued on his own time to experiment with caramel recipes and gave away samples to his friends and family. Then synchronicity happened: A theater owner acquaintance liked them so much, he started selling them at intermission. The response was so positive that Jason opened his own caramel shop. Think about how his background in business and technical and artistic skills all merged to ensure his success.

Avoid “either or thinking.” Look for ways to creatively combine all your assets.

■ Setting Your Goals and Objectives

Your goals and objectives are the road signs that lead you to what you want to attain in life. Thus, it is important that a goal be distinguished from an objective.

Goals are broad statements of purpose. They also target the desired outcome, are specific, and are long range or short term. Goals refer to an ongoing process, a challenge that is meant to stretch your limits.

Objectives are the specific and practical steps used to accomplish goals. They are short-term, bite-sized steps. They are also visible and measurable signposts that indicate where you are in relation to reaching a goal. Objectives include a statement of intent, and what you are going to do. This helps you to be accountable and serves as a yardstick by which you can measure the results of your progress.

If your goal is to learn more about a career in the teaching profession, it will take a clear set of objectives to move ahead. If you want to stop smoking, lose weight, or find a job, these goals also require clear objectives to achieve the desired results.

The statement, “I want to learn to play the piano” is a goal. It may seem clear, but actually the statement lacks the detail to be more than just on your “wish list.” It will take a series of clear objectives to accomplish, or even to begin the process of learning how to play the piano. A clear objective includes a statement of the action, conditions, and amount of time or effort—the more specific, the better. Here are some clear objectives related to this goal: “I will research piano teachers in a five-mile radius of my home by next Friday.” “I will check out recommendations and narrow down my choice by the following Tuesday.” “I will attend a weekly one-hour piano class to begin at 6 P.M. on Wednesdays at Clara Smith’s studio.” “I will practice the piano one hour each day before dinner.”

If you have trouble defining your goals, try listing the dissatisfactions and issues that capture your attention and spark your passion. Now ask yourself what you can do about them. In doing so, you have just identified some goals. For example, you may have determined that you are not currently working in a field that supports your values, interests, attitudes, and skills. The goal would be to find a career that is a better fit with your talents.

A career that meshes with your values, interests, attitudes, and skills but requires five or more years of training can be considered your long-range career goal. The entry-level jobs that can prepare you for this career can be considered your short-term career goals. Becoming a physical therapist would be a long-range career goal; becoming a physical therapy assistant or personal trainer would be the short-term goal.

Four points should be remembered in setting goals and objectives. First, *consider what you are willing to give up* to get what you want. When most people make career changes, life in general changes for them. You may need to give up free time to take special courses. You may need to take a cut in pay (temporarily or permanently) to obtain better fringe benefits, security, and a potential chance for growth in another field. Or you may need to give up being the expert and become the new kid on the block and need to prove yourself again as a competent worker.

Second, *give yourself a realistic time line* to reach your goal. If you’ve incorporated bite-sized steps (objectives) into your time line, you are more likely to achieve your goals. A time line is an effective way of listing in chronological order all the objectives needed to accomplish your goal.

Once you’ve developed a time line, it’s a good idea to show it to a friend or counselor and to sign and date it as if it were a contract. In actuality, this is a contract with yourself.

At best, you will achieve your goals; at worst, you will need to review and alter the time line or change your goal.

Third, *set your goals high*. Of course, the goal must be realistic enough to be achievable. Remind yourself that you are deserving and capable; if your initial steps are specific, clear, and bite-sized, you will achieve them. The example provided in the “Success Strategies” box titled “Sample Goal and Objectives” illustrates that each objective must have importance in itself and must help lead to the overall (larger) goal.

Finally, the fourth point about setting goals is simple and significant: *Reward yourself after completing each objective and after reaching each goal*. Some say that the mere accomplishment of the goal should be reward enough. However, most of us tend to be more motivated toward success when we have both internal and external reward systems. The internal reward is the feeling of success; the external reward is something outside of ourselves (e.g., crossing the objective off the checklist, a grade on a paper, recognition from a group of friends, dinner at a special place, or splurging on those athletic shoes you wanted). How do you reward yourself when you attain an objective or reach a goal?



SUCCESS strategies

Sample Goal and Objectives

Goal

To explore an alternative career to teaching by July of this year.

Objectives

1. By February 1st: I will start reading *The Career Fitness Program*.
2. By March 1st: I will work on each chapter exercise to advance my personal understanding and career awareness. By May, I will complete all exercises.

3. By April 1st: I will determine the strategies I will need to identify three jobs that use my talents.
4. By May 1st: I will attend a job search workshop at the college.
5. By June 1st: I will research three jobs by reading about them in the career center or library and by using the Internet to identify three or more people working in those jobs locally.
6. By July 1st: I will visit three of those people at their jobs and conduct informational interviews with them.

One way to jump-start your success is to hone your time management skills. Refer to the “Success Strategies” feature, “Time Management Strategies,” for hints on how to be more successful. Many recent high school graduates and reentry students face new unstructured situations in college and need to schedule their time strategically to allow for class attendance, study, work, leisure, and other responsibilities.

At this point, complete Exercises 8.2 through 8.6. Exercise 8.2 will help you identify and analyze three decisions. Exercises 8.3 through 8.6 will help you prioritize and evaluate decisions.



SUCCESS strategies

Time Management Strategies

1. Plan and set priorities each day.
2. Prioritize specific tasks.
3. Eliminate unnecessary work or distractions.
4. Have confidence in your judgment.
5. Work on your concentration.
6. Listen actively.
7. Focus on the present.
8. Accept the help of others.
9. Set firm deadlines.
10. Schedule relaxation time.
11. Build on successes.
12. Do something; get started!
13. Ask: What is the best use of my time now?



TIPS FROM THE PROS

People who reach their goals know how to manage their time. Notice how some of the busiest and most successful people always seem to have time. In fact, they make time because of their well-developed time management skills.



EXERCISE

8.2 Recent Decisions

List three significant decisions that you have made in the *past year*.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____



EXERCISE

8.3 Priorities

Prioritize the decisions you listed in Exercise 8.2—number one (#1) being most important. What criteria did you use to prioritize them?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____



EXERCISE

8.4 Irrevocable Decisions

Give an example of a decision you made or might make in the future that could be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to change.



EXERCISE

8.5 Harmful Decisions

Give an example of a future decision you could make that might keep you from doing something you want to do.

EXERCISE**8.6 What If . . .**

1. Suppose you have lost all financial aid plus all other sources of support. Perhaps you have been laid off or your family has withdrawn support of your education. List three things you could do to stay in school:

a. _____
 b. _____
 c. _____

2. Which of these three alternatives (a, b, c,) alternatives would be acceptable to you?

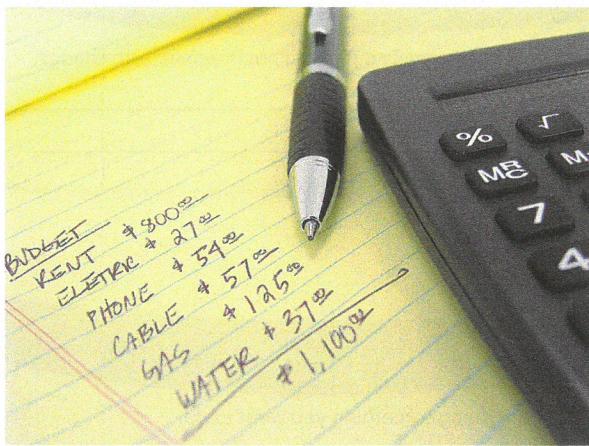
3. Suppose you have one year before losing the support. With a year to prepare, what would you do?

a. What alternatives would you choose? _____
 b. What information would you need about your chosen alternatives? _____
 c. What action would you take? _____



Managing Your Financial Resources

As you make career decisions, the goal of achieving financial independence is often one of the most important priorities. Learning how to budget money or earnings to meet your obligations is an important step toward being “career fit.” Remember, *you* are the best investment that you will ever make as a result of your increased skills through education and career choice. Although it may require attention and effort, it is worth your time, energy, and determination to take advantage of the opportunities that become available as you earn income and make further decisions about your future. Consider each of the following categories as you plan for financial security.



▲ Planning and budgeting are essential to future savings. Easy-to-use software is available to help you track expenses and income and to fulfill savings goals.

SETTING FINANCIAL GOALS

Having a vision is powerful as you decide what you want to achieve financially. To begin with, knowing what your financial needs are every month is essential to meet the necessities of paying for rent, food, car, cell phone, utilities, and other personal expenses. Recognizing and budgeting for your short-term monthly survival goals for the entire year allows you to set medium-range goals for the next one to three years. Medium-range goals would include vacations, savings, electronics, new clothes, and other items that you want to own. Finally, set longer-term goals that your savings can help you reach over a five-year or longer period, such as a down payment on a new car, a home, or a special purchase.

SAVING MONEY

Planning is essential to future savings. This means you must have a clear vision and a positive affirmation to put money aside at the beginning of each month—well before you are

tempted to spend it. Get used to saving money, and make it a habit just as you look for good deals and compare prices before making a purchase. The goal is to set aside at least *10 percent* of your income every month. By opening a bank savings account (if you have not done so already), you will have money available for emergencies or special expenditures. When you save money, you will have a reserve to handle any financial setback. Most banks make it easier to save by setting up an automatic monthly transfer of funds from a checking account to a savings account so that you don't have to remember to do it.

CREDIT CARDS

Because very few people use cash to fund all of their expenses, at some stage you will find yourself borrowing money. Individuals borrow money for an education, a car, home furnishings, or a mortgage. Doing so carefully and responsibly builds your repayment history and a strong credit rating.

Credit cards are easily obtained, but they carry the most risk. Experts on debt management say the best way to use a credit card is to pay the entire balance at the end of each month. Remember, credit cards are like accepting a high-interest loan that can keep you in debt over a *long* period of time. The concept of buying it now and paying for it later is a risky trap. The plastic card should be viewed as a stop sign that continually blinks at you “Caution – Danger Ahead.” Spend only what you can pay back this month to avoid the high interest rate.

If you instead take the “easy” credit road, you will soon find yourself paying endless high-interest charges. Think critically about your priorities, what you really need now, and what you can put aside until your financial assets increase. One of the best methods to ensure financial independence is to learn how to manage your credit card.

INSURANCE AND HEALTH NEEDS

Insurance helps individuals meet unanticipated events and obtain necessary health services. Some companies may offer health benefits, including medical and dental, and may also include some retirement and insurance incentives. If you do not obtain all the insurance and health coverage you need when you are working, then these costs become part of your monthly budget (see Exhibit 8.2). Under the Affordable Care Act (ACA) passed in 2010, all

EXHIBIT 8.2 Monthly Money Management

full-time students are covered by family health plans until the age of 26. Although it seems far into the future, it is wise to think ahead to retirement since you can no longer count on a pension from your employer. *You are your retirement plan*, so the earlier you begin, the more financially secure you will be. Paying for health, life, or car insurance or making a small retirement investment will take a portion of your money and add to your yearly costs. The younger you are when you are saving for retirement, the more money you will have when you retire or when you have unexpected breaks in employment.

TIPS FROM THE PROS

Most financial experts and self-made millionaires indicate that the fastest way to accumulate wealth is to live below your means. Stop comparing and competing for the newest, best, most expensive purchase. Make your goal to live lightly. Simplify and challenge yourself to downsize. Not only is this philosophy in fashion these days, but this will ensure your financial security and resiliency in tough times.

BUDGETING

Living within your means often takes strong discipline and a willingness to establish limits to what you spend.

It takes a special effort to make a careful list of your monthly income and expense activities, but this is the most essential and useful action you can take to keep track of your spending habits. Budgeting feeds directly into financial independence and allows you to take that summer vacation and avoid high-interest payments. Use the monthly budget management example shown in Exhibit 8.2 to develop your own financial spreadsheet.

This preliminary budget includes typical cost-of-living categories. Some elements may be different for you based on geography, income level, or other factors. For example, if you live at home, share rent, get along without a car, or do not have personal debt, your expenses may be lower. After all monthly expenses are carefully examined and deducted from your earnings, what remains is savings. In addition to the categories where you budget and spend your money, there are also unexpected costs or emergencies that may arise. This is where your savings make a critical difference. If you dip into these savings for “fun” events or items, the money will no longer be available to you for any emergencies or future needs.

Suppose you want to purchase property in a few years. How could you best prepare for this possibility? Perhaps an additional 5 percent savings could make a vital difference? What else would you change in your budget?

A budget is a monetary plan to control your financial resources and prepare for the future. You will soon realize that budgeting is the first step toward financial freedom. Personal finance software or using an app such as Quicken or Microsoft Money will help you accurately monitor your accounts.

In the final analysis, the decisions that you make about education, career, and money all take careful attention and focus. The time you spend will pay huge dividends and lead to positive outcomes. To develop and keep track of your financial literacy, check out www.cashcourse.org, a free online website designed for college students.

 TIPS

FROM THE PROS

FINANCIAL FREEDOM

1. Keep your financial reputation solid by establishing a healthy credit score. This is accomplished by avoiding debt and living within your means. Always ask yourself, "Do I really need this?" If it is a want, not a need, think twice.
2. Before spending money, ask yourself, "Is this in my best financial interest?"
3. Wait three days before making a large purchase (over \$50). This will stop "impulse shopping" while you think carefully about how this impacts your overall budget.
4. To help pay for your education, check the opportunities for grants/work study before assuming loans.
5. When possible, live at home to save rental payments.
6. Consider the full costs of owning a car. Car pooling, bicycling, and using public transportation amounts to huge savings for fuel, insurance, repairs/maintenance, and parking—and it is eco-friendly.



Stress Management

Sometimes the biggest obstacles that you will encounter in your job search and decision making are those you put in place yourself. Learn how to look out for one of those land mines that can explode and destroy your best efforts: stress.

One of the greatest sources of stress is change, even when it is positive and planned, such as the change associated with finding a new job. Positive stress is associated with high motivation, high energy, and sharp perception. However, when the job search is not working out as expected, negative stress can reduce your effectiveness in your job search in many ways. Such stress may produce psychological effects such as anxiety, fatigue, frustration, apathy, lowered self-esteem, aggression, procrastination, and depression.

Recently, much research has been done studying the brain's role in stress management. Dr. Martin Seligman, author of the 2011 book *Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-Being*, is one of many researchers who assert that changing your experience or attitude changes your brain. He suggests exercising an interest, skill, talent, or passion or performing "an act of kindness" for others will activate the left pre-frontal lobe of your brain, which increases your happiness and positivity. This engages your enjoyment endorphins and makes you feel better. One way to offset the negative emotions that cause stress is to develop a sense of control. You do this by developing time management and goal setting and rewarding your small achievements along the way.

You will need to activate coping strategies when you encounter obstacles to maintain your self-esteem and motivation to find work. To find work does not mean, however, that you need to give up your identity, sell out, or compromise on issues important to you. You may offer a different background in terms of your language ability, culture, or ethnicity, or you may simply have some unique or practiced set of skills that will differentiate you and benefit the employer. In a competitive job environment, making that extra effort to effectively communicate your value will increase your chance of getting employed.

In a tight economic market, you will be wise to consider more options. Are you flexible and willing to change your job location? Can you manage with a lower starting salary than anticipated or previously experienced? Will you consider employment in fields that are not your first choice? Human resources experts suggest that expanding your choices reduces stress in a shrinking, highly competitive environment and will result in more job offers. In the face of adversity, persistence, flexibility, and creativity will sustain your efforts.

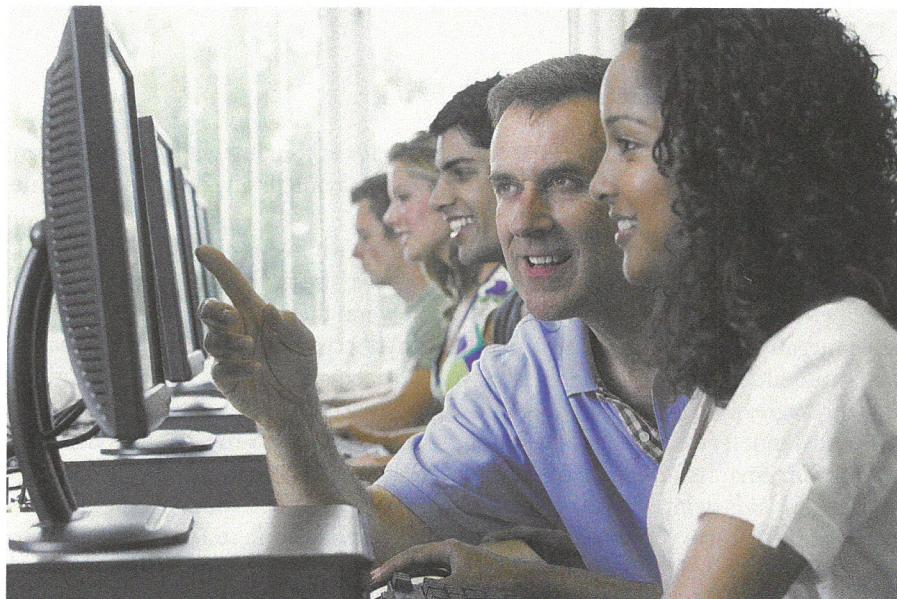
Strategies for maintaining a positive attitude and managing stress are essential. Some of these techniques are listed in this "Success Strategies" feature.



SUCCESS strategies

Stress Management Techniques

- **Take time for yourself.** Treat yourself well and pay attention to your personal needs and enjoyment.
- **Maintain or start a realistic exercise schedule.** Participate in activities you enjoy that will also get you moving. Exercise is one of the best remedies for stress.
- **Socialize with friends and family.** Your support network can help you keep your stressors in perspective.
- **Remind yourself about personal strengths.** Some people find it reassuring to create a list of things they do well to give themselves a motivational boost when life becomes overwhelming. Do something daily that is a strength or that you enjoy.
- **Practice gratitude.** Every night write down three things that went well that day. Be grateful for what is going well.
- **Encourage a sense of humor.** A good healthy laugh is a great way to keep perspective on all the changes in your life.
- **Keep your eye on the goal!** Remember why you are working so hard and how good it will feel when you finally reach your goals.



▲ If you require help making decisions about school or work, take advantage of campus resources such as counselors and advisers.



Researching Education and Training Options

If you are not completing four years of college and want to select a job that can best fulfill your career goals as soon as possible, you have at least two issues to address: job information and training requirements. Using your social network, contact people working in the field of your interest. Using your personal contacts, call people working in the field or the professional or trade association for that field to obtain information on courses, internships, apprenticeships, volunteer, and on-the-job training options. Usually, people who work in a field know which schools have the best reputation. Public community colleges, technical junior colleges, and adult and proprietary schools also offer a variety of training programs. Be sure to compare the courses you will be required to take with the preparation and skills necessary to perform the job. Making informed decisions depends on accurate information.

If you are exploring career opportunities as a result of company downsizing or personal or family changes, it is even more important that you make informed decisions. All that you have learned about yourself and the decision-making process in this chapter, along with the exercises that follow, will strengthen your decision-making muscles.



▲ Congratulations on making a decision!



FROM THE PROS

USE WEBSITES TO HELP WITH COLLEGE CHOICE

When selecting a training school, college (or transfer college), or graduate school, academic counselors recommend that you research how colleges compare on factors like affordability, diversity, graduation rates, and graduates' pay and debt after graduation. You might search for this information on the following websites, where you can compare several colleges on the same factors:

- **College Insight:** Highlights data on schools' affordability, diversity, and student success. Can compare data on up to four sources at the college, state, or national levels.
- **College Measures:** This site draws from multiple data sources to show schools' performances in areas such as student success, school efficiency and productivity, and graduates pay and debt.
- **College Navigator:** Data primarily from the National Center for Education Statistics, which builds and compares lists of schools; also has an interactive map.
- **College Results Online:** A web tool from the Education Trust that provides information about college graduation rates. The site lets users compare colleges by many criteria, including graduation rates, financial aid, student cost, and freshman admission data.



EXERCISE your options

As you complete this chapter focusing on your decision-making process, you have heightened your awareness of all the variables that are involved in making satisfying decisions. You addressed your choices to deal with managing time, to live within a financial budget, to handle stress and learn to relax, and to narrow your career focus.

What one decision can you make today to move forward on your future career plan?

Decision _____



Summary

Successful career planning involves two processes related to goals: defining your goals and knowing how to reach them. The more completely you plan out your objectives, the more likely you will be to achieve your goals. The key to the process is overcoming the hurdle of negative thinking. Block out the tendency to be self-critical. Put aside your anticipation of failure, your fears and excuses, and your past habits. Allow yourself the right to create goals that energize you and take you beyond your past efforts.

The following exercises are designed to help you become aware of steps in the decision-making process and to encourage you to set some career and life goals. For example, you will be asked to decide what you want to do by the end of the current year and then one year from now. This can mean acquiring new skills or improving current skills, moving toward career advancement or career change, or staying where you are. Remember to try to picture in your mind what you want in your work life (e.g., type of work, responsibility, surroundings, salary, management relationship), and then focus on the steps necessary to reach your goals. If you can't picture the necessary steps, you need to gather more information (e.g., from people who have been in similar positions or from written materials about the field) so you can move forward on career decisions.

ROLANDO'S MIDTERM PROJECT: A CREATIVE SUMMARY OF HIS CAREER DECISION MAKING

Everybody goes through their erroneous zones of experiencing self-doubt
Instead of beating yourself with negativity just find another route

You're in charge of your happiness so take responsibility

Time wasted feeling guilty is messing up your ability

To live in the moment, you don't need approval

You only have one life to live so make every minute useful

As les brown explained I have greatness within me

I deserve the best so I have my mind focused on winning

Do what you gotta do, hustle to reach your goals

Fail 'til you succeed, life is filled with obstacles

People's opinion of you does not have to become your reality

There's only one you so make yourself unique from humanity

We control our own lives not anyone else or the environment

Everything we do, our actions is to our entitlement

I know it's not easy, control requires discipline

In life you have choices, just hope you make the right decision

My locus of control will always be internal

Putting the blame on anything else, no that's external

Take ownership of your values, but first you need your own purpose

Without one, it's going to be short term and worthless

Ask yourself, "Is this what I really want to do?"

How is this going to affect my life? Am I going to pull through?

Independence and recognition comes with a satisfied career

Along with creativity, achievement, and support from your peers

Acquire information that suits well with your learning style

Can be from hands on or hearing, your skills are versatile

Knowing what you enjoy will guide you to the right career and education

Going through this process will take some time and dedication

What are your interests? Conventional, social, or realistic?

Can also be investigative, enterprising, or artistic.

Personality varies from person to person
 You either focus your attention intro or extraversion
 Do you focus your mind on the presence you live?
 Or do you look at the bigger picture which makes you intuitive

— Rolando Scott, student, Cypress College, California

PURPOSE OF EXERCISES

The exercises that follow will help increase your awareness about how you make decisions. *There are no right or wrong answers.*

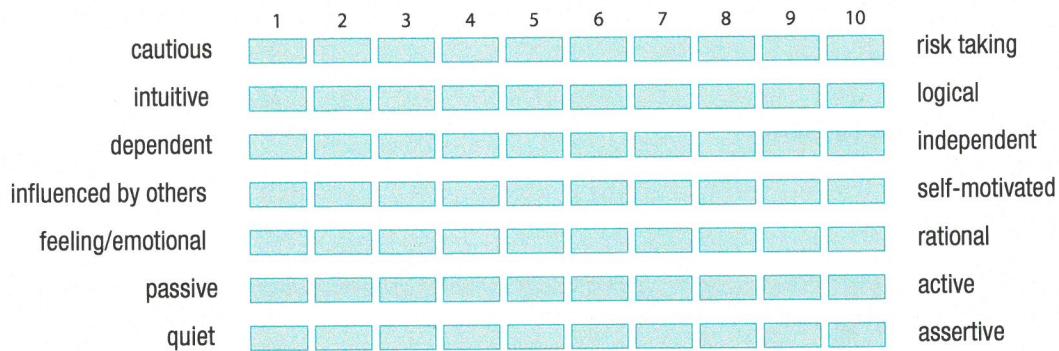
Exercise 8.7 asks you to rank yourself on two dimensions of decision-making style. This helps you become aware of

your personal style of decision making. Exercise 8.8 tests your ability to recognize and state clear objectives. In Exercise 8.9, you are encouraged to test your assumptions.

EXERCISE

8.7 Ranking Yourself

Place a check (✓) on each of the scales here to indicate your style of decision making with number 1 being closer to the words in the left column and 10 being closer to the words in the right column:



EXERCISE

8.8 Specific/Nonspecific Objectives

The following statements are objectives. Read each objective and decide whether the objective is specific or nonspecific. Imagine that a person will be clearly motivated to explore these objectives rather than merely think about them. These are statements anyone might make; they don't necessarily apply to you. Imagine that someone is standing in front of you making each of these statements. With that in mind, mark each objective as "S" (specific) or "N" (nonspecific) to the left of the statement.

- _____ 1. I want to explore my interests.
- _____ 2. I want to get a good job.
- _____ 3. I'd like to get an idea of the job I'm best suited for.
- _____ 4. I'd like to take Spanish next semester and for at least two years more, so I'll have another skill to use as a teacher.
- _____ 5. When I leave school, I want to get a job that pays at least \$15 an hour.
- _____ 6. Tomorrow I'm going to make a one-hour appointment to see Ms. Rogers in her office.
- _____ 7. I want to get at least a B on every history exam and earn a B as my final grade this semester.
- _____ 8. I'm going to ask Teresa to help me find some information about health careers in the Career Development and Placement Center right after class.

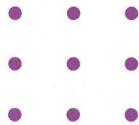
EXERCISE 8.8 Specific/Nonspecific Objectives *CONTINUED*

- _____ 9. I plan to move to an area where there are lots of jobs.
- _____ 10. I want to be accepted by the state university when I graduate.
- _____ 11. I want to find out more about myself.
- _____ 12. I want to get along better with other people at work.
- _____ 13. Next week I'm going to spend more time with my friends.
- _____ 14. I'm going to investigate one good website about social service careers tonight.
- _____ 15. I want to get a good education.

Answers are located on page 160.

EXERCISE**8.9 Test Your Assumptions**

1. Try to connect the nine dots with only four straight lines and without lifting your pen.



2. Make a 6 out of IX by adding one line.



Answers are located on page 160.



Please go to the Career Fitness Portfolio at the end of the book and complete this chapter summary to document your personal Career Fitness Profile. Or, you may go to MyStudentSuccessLab and complete the Career Fitness Portfolio (CFP) assignment in each module.

Your instructor may choose to assign the Career Fitness Portfolio in class or online in MyStudentSuccessLab.

ANSWERS TO EXERCISE 8.8

- | | | | | |
|------|------|------|-------|-------|
| 1. N | 4. S | 7. N | 10. N | 13. N |
| 2. N | 5. N | 8. S | 11. N | 14. S |
| 3. N | 6. S | 9. N | 12. N | 15. N |

ANSWERS TO EXERCISE 8.9

1. (X)

(Note: The directions did not mandate a straight line.)

2. (S)IX