



SOCIETY OF ACTUARIES

Article from:

The Stepping Stones

April 2010 – Issue 38

Adopt “Good Enough” Thinking Now

REPRINTED COURTESY OF THE LIFE DOCKTOR. COPYRIGHT 2010.

by Dr. Doreen Stern



Dr. Doreen Stern is a motivational speaker, writer and business coach in Hartford, Conn. She is currently working on a book entitled, *Change Your Life in 17 Minutes!* She can be reached at Docktor@DoreenStern.com, or at 860.293.1619.

Do you ALWAYS try to do your best? If so, you may be shocked by what I’m going to propose: be willing to accept “good enough.” Good enough at work, at home and even in your personal life.

How could someone who has earned a doctorate and two master’s degrees offer such heretical advice? Someone whose middle finger on her right hand is bent out of shape from gripping the pencil so tightly as a child? Trying to do her VERY best, of course.

My recommendation is based on award-winning research.

In the 1950s, Nobel-Prize winning economist and psychologist Herbert Simon introduced the term “satisficing.” It refers to settling for something that’s “good enough,” without worrying that there might be something BETTER out there.

“Satisficing” doesn’t mean you jettison standards and criteria. But your standards aren’t sky-high or impossible to meet. Thus, you’re generally pleased with the results you achieve and the choices you make.

Here’s an example: hundreds of thousands of American high school seniors receive acceptance letters every April. Do they—and their parents—celebrate their acceptances, or do they instead lament their rejections? Sure, Harvard would be terrific, yet Berkeley might provide a wonderful experience, too. Especially since research indicates that students who think they’re in the right place get far more out of a particular school than students who don’t.

Those who choose to lament may be “maximizers”: folks who seek and accept only the very best. “Maximizers” want to feel certain that every choice they make is the best one possible. And every piece of work they complete is top shelf.

What’s the problem with being a “maximizer”? You’re rarely happy with the results you obtain. Or

the choices you make. On balance, “maximizers” experience less satisfaction with life along with less optimism and less happiness. Also more depression.

How can you identify whether you’re predominantly a “satisficer” or a “maximizer”? Take the short quiz¹ below, rating yourself based on 1 (completely disagree) to 7 (completely agree). Add up your points. Then read below how you can increase your “satisficer” score.

1. Whenever I’m faced with a choice, I try to imagine what all the other possibilities are, even ones that aren’t present at the moment. (1 – 7)
2. No matter how satisfied I am with my job, it’s only right for me to be on the lookout for better opportunities. (1 – 7)
3. When I am in the car listening to the radio, I often check other stations to see if something better is playing, even if I am relatively satisfied with what I’m listening to. (1 – 7)
4. When I watch TV, I channel surf, often scanning through the available options even while attempting to watch one program. (1 – 7)
5. I treat relationships like clothing; I expect to try a lot before finding the perfect fit. (1 – 7)
6. I often find it difficult to shop for a gift for a friend. (1 – 7)
7. Renting videos is really difficult. I’m always struggling to find the best one. (1 – 7)
8. When shopping, I have a hard time finding clothing that I really love. (1 – 7)
9. I’m a big fan of lists that attempt to rank things; such as the best movies, the best singers, the best athletes, the best novels and the best teams. (1 – 7)
10. I find that writing is very difficult, even if it’s just writing a letter to a friend, because it’s hard

¹ Maximization Scale and ratings, courtesy of American Psychological Association, included in *The Paradox of Choice*, by Barry Schwartz

to word things just right. I often do several drafts of even simple things. (1 – 7)

11. No matter what I do, I have the highest standards for myself. (1 – 7)
12. I never settle for second best. (1 – 7)
13. I often fantasize about living in ways that are quite different from my actual life. (1 – 7)

Total points _____

Key: Scores of 40 or below: Congratulations! You are a “satisficer.”

Scores of 65 and above: You are clearly on the maximizing end of the scale. Be sure to review the suggestion below.

HOW CAN YOU INCREASE YOUR “SATISFICER” SCORE?

“Choose when to choose,” suggests Dr. Barry Schwartz of Swathmore College. Sometimes doing your very best is worth every ounce of effort you put in. Yet sometimes it’s not. Consider a recent project you worked your hardest to complete. Itemize the steps, time, research and anxiety that went into finishing the project.

Remind yourself how it felt to do the work.

Ask yourself how much your final product benefited from your laborious efforts.

Write a paragraph describing what you might do differently next time. If you’d care to share your paragraph, e-mail it to me: Docktor@DoreenStern.com.

