



Article from

## **The Stepping Stone**

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# CAREER DEVELOPMENT

## The Simple, Shocking Tool You're Forgetting to Use When Making Career Decisions

By Darcy Eikenberg

We make good decisions all the time.

- We park in the middle of the lot to squeeze in a few more steps.
- We set the alarm and get out of bed when it rings—even a few minutes before.
- We resist criticizing our spouse, kids or co-workers when they act like jerks. (Okay, maybe they get an eye roll, but we keep our mouths shut.)

In fact, we make good decisions many times during the day. Of course, we have our share of stinky decisions from time to time (“sure, I’ll take a third slice of pizza”), but that just makes us human.

So, with all of the decision-making experience we have, why do we get so stuck when we’re making career decisions? Why do we get overwhelmed, frustrated and even angry at ourselves trying to figure out what’s next for us? Why do we stay unhappy, or, even worse, feel bored and wasted in our lives at work?

*Why is this so hard?!!*

### HERE’S WHY MAKING CAREER DECISIONS IS HARD

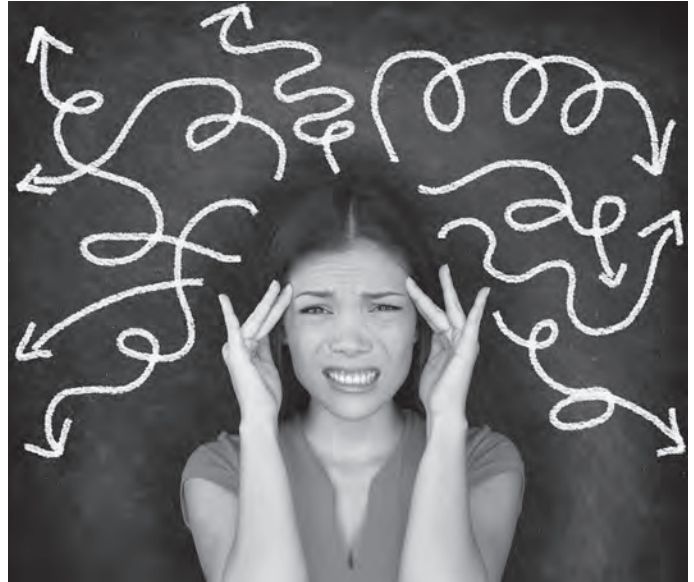
I’ve been doing an extensive amount of research about decision-making. Each day, I hear **what** the clients and students who I work with get stuck on, but I wanted to understand more about **why** they get stuck in the first place.

And the data is eye-opening. Surprising. Shocking, even. Because while each of us has struggled (or has known someone who’s struggled) with making a career decision, we all have the same magic tool available to us.

And it’s free.

### IT’S NOT THE PRO/CON LIST

Did you know that the world’s most common decision-making tool—the pro/con list—was actually invented by Benjamin Frank-



lin? According to Chip and Dan Heath in their book, *Decisive: How to Make Better Choices in Life and Work*, a friend asked Franklin how to decide between two options. Franklin suggested taking a piece of paper and drawing a line down the center, marking one side “pro” and the other “con.”

The Heaths point out this surprising fact: that somehow, this process has remained our default decision-making tool to this day. (Take a minute to swallow that. With all the innovation and technology in our hands, we **still** go back to something started in 1772. Yow.) But they point out that the pro/con list, while ubiquitous and accessible, is inherently flawed.

You probably already know this from your own experience. You’ve probably sat down and written up a pro/con list. Maybe you have one right now. And, looking at it, you clearly see that one list is significantly longer than the other. But you still can’t decide.

### OK, SO WHAT’S THE MAGIC TOOL?

The pro/con list doesn’t work because it doesn’t take into account the one magic tool you’re overlooking: your emotion. (Cut to you: scrunched-up sour face, like you ate bad turkey.) Oh yes, I see you. This makes you uncomfortable.

Good. Because discomfort is where growth is. You’re uncomfortable because you were taught that there’s no room for emotion in today’s world of work.

You were told, “It’s not personal; it’s just business.” Right? Me too. Well, we’ve been taught wrong. Work is **always** personal. And that makes decisions around our work extremely personal.

(According to the Heaths, Franklin had a basic understanding of the emotional value of each element while using his pro/con

list. He called it “moral algebra,” giving different items different weights. Somehow, that complexity has gotten lost since 1772.)

### TO MAKE CAREER DECISIONS, STOP AVOIDING YOUR EMOTIONS

Most of us want to resist believing that our best career decisions will come from paying attention to our emotions. We often don't value them, trust them, and, sometimes, we're not really sure what they are. We say things like, “Oh, maybe I'm just tired,” or “Maybe it'll get better tomorrow.”

But when we pay honest, respectful attention to our true emotions, we know whether those statements are true or not. Or we know if we're just kidding ourselves.

### IT'S ONLY HUMAN

Unlike machines, plants or animals, human beings are uniquely equipped with emotions. Even Siri doesn't really feel anything.

Any human-like reactions were programmed in its chip-based head by a fellow human.

Emotions are what make us messy—and marvelous. Understanding and knowing how to interpret and use emotion effectively is one of the secret strategies for a successful career today. And it's the surprising tool you're likely overlooking on your path to making the right career decision for you.

Use it wisely, use it well, use it often—and you'll make the career decisions that are right for you. ■



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