

The Freedom to Choose

“When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves.” - Viktor Frankl

We may not always be able to control the circumstances of a given situation we find ourselves in. But we always have the freedom to choose how we respond. The choice we make – and how we make it – often determines how well we survive the situation, and if we go on to thrive.

If challenges in your family life, your career, or your finances are making you feel powerless, try approaching the challenge from a new angle. This simple three-step process can put you back in touch with your freedom to choose how and why you live your life.

1. Consider your reaction.

Take a step back from the problem. Take a breath. Take a walk. Pour yourself a cup of coffee.

By creating some space, you'll be able to ask yourself, “Why am I reacting the way that I'm reacting? Is there a better perspective I could be taking? Am I letting past experiences influence my reaction for better? For worse?”

When we feel overwhelmed by a challenge, we often fall back on established patterns in our thinking. Often these default reactions are negative. If we're arguing with our spouse, we might replay past arguments in the back of our heads. Financial difficulty might trigger memories of our parents struggling with money as we were growing up

Identifying the negative experiences and perspectives that create our immediate reactions to challenges can help us find ways to create more positive and empowering reactions.

2. Consider your purpose.

Instead of allowing the situation to dictate how you're responding, push back. Refocus how you choose to respond around the goal that you are trying to accomplish.

For example, if your business partner backs out of the new company you've been planning to start, that loss of manpower and capital could make you feel defeated and powerless. But the reality is that you are choosing to dwell on negatives that you can't control. So, what can you control?

If you're really committed to starting your new company, you can choose instead to focus on alternative funding sources. You can reach out to other friends, family, and colleagues about potential partnerships. You can choose to work on Plan B.

Another example is the investor who feels powerless as market volatility chips away at his nest egg for a quarter. No, you can't control the natural disaster or political spat that's giving the market fits right now. But you can choose to focus on your long-term purpose: a secure retirement for you and your family. That positive thinking and big-picture perspective could prevent a costly knee-jerk reaction.

3. Consider your values

One of the best ways to drive negative thinking from our reactions is to focus on the things that matter the most to us. Reconnecting our decision making to our values can lead to solutions that make life more fulfilling. Of course, learning doesn't just mean signing up for formal classes. We spend so much of our lives on social media these days that it bears repeating: you can do a whole lot more with your phone and PC than get sucked into the latest tweetstorm. When was the last time you closed that Facebook app and opened up an ebook reader or audiobook player? You could also make the morning commute or exercise more stimulating if you cue up a podcast for some on-the-go learning.

Work might be the most common source of challenges in our lives. And while no one loves absolutely everything about their job all the time, it's worth considering how your job affects your sense of freedom. Do those 40 hours per week give you the financial resources to spend your free time doing what you want with the people you love? Are your skills and talents utilized in ways that make you feel like you're making positive contributions? Does your employer have a mission bigger than profit that's important to you?

If your answers are no, no, and no, you can choose to keep dragging yourself out of bed every Monday, resigned to the uninspiring week ahead. Or you can follow your values towards a more empowering choice. Consider a career change. Learn a new skill that will bolster your resume or line you up for a better job at your current employer.

If switching careers is really out of the question right now, choose to appreciate the parts of your job that you do well because of your unique skillset. And when you're not working, make time for the hobbies, interests, and experiences that do fully engage your core values. Who knows? One day these pursuits might lead to exciting new opportunities for you and your family. If you've been committed to your values all along, you'll be ready to make the right choice.

Are you choosing your best possible life?

If you'd like more insights on how you approach challenges and choices in your life, we provide a complimentary online assessment. It will help you identify the areas of your life where you're feeling good and those areas where you might want to make some enhancements. E-mail us to receive your link to the tool.

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