



A Decision Making Checklist That Works With Your Emotions, Not Against Them

A step-by-step guide for making the best decision possible.



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Feb 19 · 4 min read ★

Checklists save lives: after pilots and surgeons started using checklists to make sure they weren't skipping important steps, accidents, infection rates, and deaths all declined. In this section, we've put together a "manage your mind" checklist. We obviously can't map out the perfect series of steps for each unique decision you'll face, but checking off the boxes for these basic steps will help you prevent easy-to-make mistakes.

First, to anyone whose nightly ritual is to mentally flip through all the terrible decisions you've made, listen up: life is filled with uncertainty. You might still be wrong even with the right process in place. You can accurately predict that a coin flip is equally likely to be heads or tails, but you'll never be able to say with complete certainty that it will be heads. So don't be overly hard on yourself if things don't turn out perfectly.

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INDECISION JEOPARDY

GOOGLE SEARCHES I THOUGHT WOULD HELP	THINGS I SHOULD BE DOING INSTEAD OF WORRYING	POTENTIALLY CRIPPLING REGRETS	PEOPLE WHO HAVE LISTENED TO ME OBSESS	OUTLANDISH WORST CASE SCENARIOS
\$ 200	\$ 200	\$ 200	\$ 200	\$ 200
\$ 400	\$ 400	\$ 400	\$ 400	\$ 400
\$ 600	\$ 600	\$ 600	\$ 600	\$ 600
\$ 800	\$ 800	\$ 800	\$ 800	\$ 800
\$ 1,000	\$ 1,000	\$ 1,000	\$ 1,000	\$ 1,000

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#1. Write out your options. If you've written down only two things, take a moment to see if you can introduce an additional alternative. Choices usually aren't binary. When you limit your decision to yes or no, or A or B, you make the stakes much higher than they might actually be. So if you've listed "Stay at my current job" and "Take the new job," think about whether you could broaden your menu by adding something like "Stay at my current job and ask for a promotion."

#2. List everything you're feeling. Are you irritated? Afraid? Craving caffeine?

#3. Regulate or counteract each irrelevant emotion.

#4. Link the remaining relevant emotions to specific options. Notice if a feeling is tied to a single choice. Are you most excited when you imagine yourself picking option A? Are you afraid you'll regret choosing option B?

#5. Ask what, not why. Compare “Why are you afraid?” to “What are you afraid of?” You can easily answer the first question with a self-pitying platitude (“Because I never try anything new”), but the second forces you to address your specific feelings about the decision at hand. “Why questions draw us to our limitations; what questions help us see our potential. Why questions stir up negative emotions; what questions keep us curious,” writes psychologist Tasha Eurich.

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#6. Figure out your decision-making tendency. Which of the following better describes you?

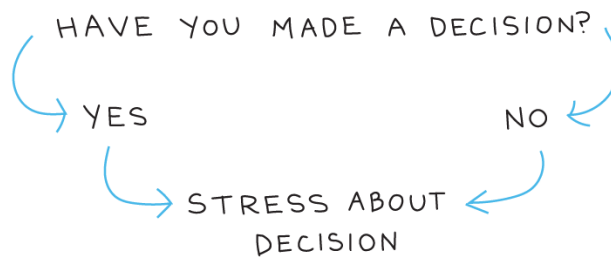
A. You like to gather as much information about your options as you can before picking one. Even if you find something that meets your requirements, you feel compelled to keep looking just in case. You want to pick the best possible option.

B. You have a general idea of what you want, and once you find a reasonably suitable option, you pick it and move on. “Good enough,” you think.

If you picked A, you’re a maximizer. If you picked B, you’re a satisficer. Satisficers are usually happier with their decisions, even when maximizers end up with objectively better options. For example, maximizers tend to find jobs that pay more, but they are less likely to be happy with their choice because they get weighed down by complicated, inconclusive second-guessing.

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A MAXIMIZER'S PROCESS



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Maximizers, here are some strategies to help you get unstuck:

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Narrow down your choices tournament-style:

- Divide your options into equal piles (for example, if you have six options, make three piles of two).
- Pick the best option from each pile.
- Put the winners into a new pile.
- Pick the best option from the pile of winners.

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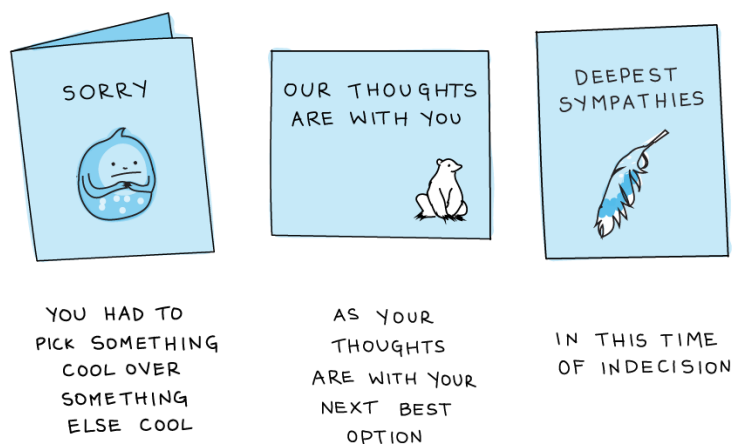
Arbitrarily limit the number of choices you consider. Say you're deciding where to go to lunch. You can tell yourself you'll look at only

three places, instead of thirty. “‘Good enough’ is almost always good enough,” advises Barry Schwartz, author of *The Paradox of Choice*.

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Don't rush through the final decision. Going back and forth between two options isn't all bad. When you're faced with a novel decision, anxiety or indecision might just be your brain's way of slowing you down so it has enough time to more accurately weigh the evidence for or against each option.

SYMPATHY CARDS FOR MAXIMIZERS

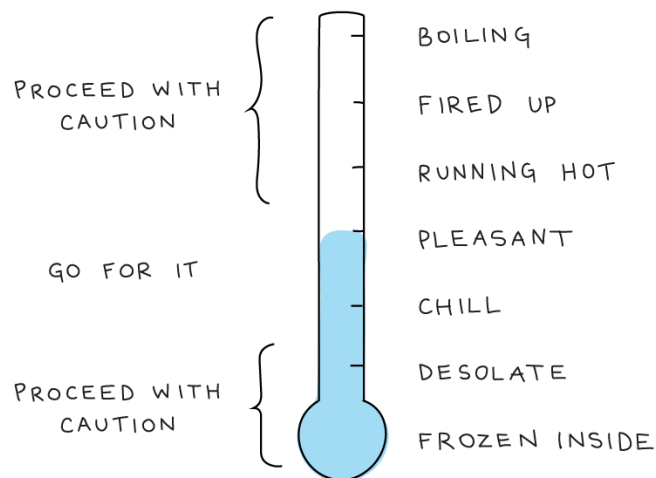


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#7. Run your thinking by another person. Walk a mentor, colleague, or friend through your options. Verbalizing your thought process forces you to synthesize the information you've been collecting. The other person can also help identify biases that may be affecting your decision making.

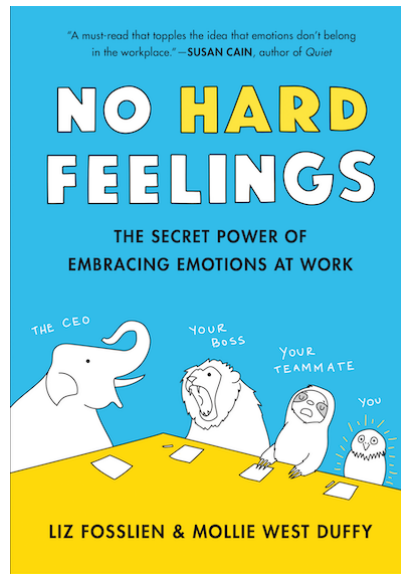
BEFORE YOU MAKE A DECISION
TAKE YOUR EMOTIONAL TEMPERATURE



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#8. Make a decision. After completing the above steps, you should be able to rule out a fair number of options and be confident you made the best decision you could. And luckily, research shows that our minds work hard to help us stay content with whatever we choose—even when what actually happens is different from what we expected.

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This excerpt comes from the book, **No Hard Feelings: The Secret Power of Embracing Emotions at Work**, by Liz Fosslien and Mollie West Duffy.