

CHAPTER 1

Deciding to Decide

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Take It, Leave It, Change It

Today's decisions are tomorrow's realities.

—Anonymous

The Reactor Factor is all about making decisions to get better outcomes. I believe you always have three choices: you can (1) Take it, (2) Leave it, or (3) Change it. I call this the “TLC” of decision making. When you are stuck, you need to stop, decide to decide, and ask yourself the TLC of deciding to decide. Excuses and whining don't allow you to take a fresh look at what you can control; TLC does. TLC requires you to take personal responsibility and be accountable for your actions. True business success is established by conquering the Reactor Factor and learning how to quickly turn the negatives into more palpable and positive outcomes.

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Oh, I know; life is hard, and it is not always fair. But look at it this way: you can choose to let your situation suck the life out of you; or you can rise above all the negative chatter about not being able to control your boss, your company, your peers, your subordinates, your job, your time, and your projects. And yes, it really is your choice.

In fact, every situation you face gives you the opportunity to choose and control the outcome. It stuns me that so many professionals choose *not* to take personal responsibility for their outcomes. For many, pointing fingers is easier; and then they wonder why they feel so out of control. This book will not only help you make better choices, it will also help you understand what you can control.

Destiny is no matter of chance. It is a matter of choice: It is not a thing to be waited for, it is a thing to be achieved.

—William Jennings Bryan, American politician and orator

For example, let's suppose that you are a member of a successful industry and are drawing a decent paycheck. The company has a moderate level of growth, but is always looking for ways to cut corners and save money. Your success has been moderate, and looking back, you know you have survived a few rough patches. You can learn to control the uncontrollable by focusing on these questions and more.

- Do you choose to broaden your scope and learn something new, or are you stuck in intellectual arrogance?
- Do you know your real value in the industry, or merely within your company?
- Are you prepared if the market changes—whether good or bad?

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Don't get sucked into trying to control elements of business that you *can't* control. Think about the situations you face. What are you deciding to do? Are you trying to control the uncontrollable? Here are the facts:

- If you have a toxic boss, you will never change him or her.
- If a colleague is a jerk, you won't get him or her to leave.
- If you hate your job, doing nothing will not make it better.
- If the younger generation entering your business works differently than you do, you won't get them to change.
- If you are fearful of anything, take a hard look at where the fear originates.
- If you don't make enough money, complaining will not increase your pay.
- If you are overworked, taking a day off won't reduce your workload.
- If you have unpaid bills, borrowing more will not reduce your debt.

Some choices we live not only once but a thousand times over, remembering them for the rest of our lives.

—Richard Bach, American writer

You need to consider these factors and decide to Take It, Leave It, or Change It.

Take It

Accept the above situations for what they are, and don't let these issues throw you off balance or create stress. It is what it is; in the

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moment, you know that you need to do something. However, the situation isn't going to change overnight. You may decide to trigger your thinking into action by beginning to work out a plan to make the future better and different. But right now—in this very instant—you have decided to take it as it is, and not complain to anyone about your circumstance. Because, to be honest, they really don't care.

Choice: You've decided you don't like your job. You are ticked off, fed up, and are tempted to quit on the spot. You step back from the situation and realize that while leaving right away is probably not feasible, it is ultimately what you will do. You decide to make the best of it and refuse to be part of the grapevine and gossip. You will do your job to the best of your ability, including asking clarifying questions to stay on track. You start to make a plan so you know tomorrow will be better and different than today. Tomorrow might be a week, a month, a year—or even years! But right now, you will take it.

You have decided to take it, so your assertiveness is stronger than ever, and both your internal and external communications are controlled. You are managing your stress, and you're not making yourself crazy over the situation. Perhaps you just don't want to take the time right now to really tackle the event, but you have assured yourself that you will rehash the situation within three months.

Leave It

You walk away from the situation and reject it totally. You know you have to do this to save your sanity. You've had to quit a personal

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relationship or fire a friend or partner in your life; and you acknowledge that this will bring some emotional pain and stress. But ultimately, you move yourself away from the situation. This is the most difficult of all the choices because you are realigning into the unknown and expanding your comfort zone. You recognize that there is a risk to moving beyond where you are right now, but you are ready to face the fear of making the decision to jettison yourself to something totally new.

Choice: You are beyond being able to rationally stay, and are ready to leave skid marks and move on. Though it is high risk, you have done your planning and have a firm commitment from another employer. This position seems to be a better, if not a perfect, fit. Your gut is telling you to jump, take a risk, and go for it. You step back from it all and ask yourself, "What's the worst thing that can happen?" The answer is simple. If you don't like this new position, you can dive right back into the talent pool and start searching again. You feel good with your decision and have the confidence to jump ship.

For what is the best choice for each individual is the highest it is possible for him to achieve.

—Aristotle, Ancient Greek philosopher

Change It

Your boss and your job are creating stress and unrest for you. The company is exactly where you want to establish your career, but you

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are working with idiots. However, you decide to stay and make the best of it by changing your approach. You read up on how to handle toxic people and destructive situations, and after analyzing your own, you have new approaches through your enhanced skills. In addition, you find an internal mentor who will help you succeed, and, per his or her suggestion, you pay careful attention to the press releases and grapevine to see if any new opportunities arise for you within the company. Reviewing your education and knowledge bank, you decide to take a class that will give you tools to help you fit into the company growth. In addition, you freshen up your resume and are ready at a moment's notice when your dream position opens.

There is nothing wrong with change, if it is in the right direction.

—Winston Churchill, British orator

Change it: Your job is not delivering the satisfaction, challenge, or success that you want out of your career. Interviewing other segments of the business and industry seems to be a viable alternative. So you begin networking internally, externally, and through the social networks to determine what is available. Your goal is to repackage your current talents and skills and apply them to a job description that will deliver what you need. You are willing to learn and to take the risk.

You evaluate the people with whom you spend time and go to lunch and decide that they are negative and promote some of your unrest. You tell them that your break time will be study time. Gradually, you will be able to choose new break buddies and create a

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more positive environment at work. You are comfortable in your own skin, and you're not worried about what others will say about you.

Todd Davis, Chief Executive Officer at LifeLock, is the gentleman you see in the LifeLock advertisements that gives out his social security number. I asked him about this decision, and yes, it was his idea to spread this otherwise "secret" number, and he had a wonderful response. Davis said, "I want to be disruptive and do things that no one else will do or has thought of." He continued by saying, "And that is what I expect of everyone at LifeLock." He also said he suffers from *Blissful Ignorance* and this helps him take risks where others wouldn't.

As a leader, he lives this quote. For example, the call center employees receive full benefits from the beginning of being hired and they make one third more than the national average of CSRs (customer service representatives). This attitude has permeated the culture as well. One of LifeLock's employees had a family crisis during the holidays. Their finances were strained, so the day the employees received their holiday gift cards from the company, they quickly pooled them and presented them to a very surprised family. That is living Davis's quote and sustaining the culture, *Do what you should, not what you can*. And another example of the company's goodwill is to provide company equity to each of the more than 400 employees.

Davis expects all employees to make decisions and move fast. All he wants to know is why you did it and he'll "watch your back." Davis expects upfront communication before the chaos hits and always wants people to ask themselves, "Am I bringing value here?" Along with that statement he added that he expects to be able to ask anyone, anytime, "What are you doing and how does it contribute to the mission?" He also said, "Don't fake it here, because you will get found out!" and these people get "pruned," not fired.

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He ended our interview by saying, "I owe the company my best."

LESSON

Do what you should. Not what you can.

Choice: Your industry has been doing well. The upturns in the economy had provided several years of sizeable bonus checks. Because you are well versed on the economy, you understand that it is cyclical and that there could be—and probably would be—a downturn. However, the money is great in your position so you decide to ride the wave as long as possible. You couldn't leave—the pay was too good! Then one day it happened and the bottom seemed to drop out of everything to do with business. The sudden cutbacks were unexpected, and you were laid off with no warning. However, your flexibility saved the day. You understood your talents, had an updated resume, and you immediately applied to other viable businesses. The list was long and included franchise companies, law firms, health-care facilities, and more.

Question: Could you truly say you fit all the criteria to work at LifeLock? Are you willing to make disruptive decisions to help your company and yourself succeed?

LESSON

Make disruptive decisions and stay on task.

How is *your* industry doing? Since the beginning of 2007, more than 70,500 workers have lost their jobs at mortgage lending

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institutions, according to recent company layoff announcements and data compiled by global outplacement firm Challenger, Gray & Christmas and also information from MortgageDaily.com publisher Sam Garcia. How many people working in this industry even understood the cycle and planned for it? Not many.

Meanwhile, construction companies have announced nearly 1,470,000 jobs cuts last year according to McGraw Hill Construction's "Outlook '09, Spring Update" report, while the National Association of Realtors expects membership rolls to decline this year for the first time in a decade. If business is cyclical, why were so many people shocked by these events? If the writing on the wall started in January 2007, why weren't more people prepared to face unemployment? It is your personal responsibility to prepare for the best- and the worst-case scenarios. *The Reactor Factor* is all about being prepared.

Many, probably most, housing industry employees never planned for a downturn and thought they could ride the wave of the fat paychecks forever. How do you process this industry downturn information? Microsoft is also slashing jobs as sales of PCs plummet. Employees have arrived at the stark realization that the slump in sales could last a long time, perhaps years. Think about what this will do to semiconductor chipmaker Intel, and the hundreds—maybe thousands—of vendors related to the computing industry. Technology spending will decline 3 percent, or \$1.66 billion, globally this year—the first such decline in seven years—as businesses and governments cut back on their spending amid deepening recession, according to a new prediction by Forrester Research.

And how about banking? The U.S. financial industry has been shedding jobs at a record clip, and some analysts predict the pace will only accelerate over the next year and a half as banks cut costs

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in the face of the housing market slump and the weak economy. Analysts at financial research firm Celent said that they expect the U.S. commercial banking industry—essentially, all companies that lend or collect deposits—to lose 200,000 of its 2 million jobs.

Dave Matthews is President of Reliance Loan Center in Arizona. He says:

I am trying to stay light on my feet, so I can react quickly if something goes wrong. We have managed to stay lean and mean, but I am implementing more and more monitoring of our customer base so we can react quickly if things change.

What might change in my industry? One of my customer's largest customers files bankruptcy . . . a tenant asks for a reduction in the lease rate . . . suppliers start dragging out making their A/P payments . . . there are any number of things. The quicker I can respond, the quicker I can protect my asset (loan) and the quicker I can protect my client's deposits!

LESSON

Stay lean and mean and focus on your customer.

The following questions are critical for you to ask yourself. The questions and answers will help you make better choices when faced with negative situations. You will have critical thinking tools that will help you move to more positive and powerful results. Each of these tools is discussed in detail throughout the book.

My goal is to get you thinking about what you need to ponder and how you can Plan to Prosper. Your career does not have to

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be a life sentence; you do not have to feel trapped and unfulfilled. *The Reactor Factor* gives you renewed focus and strength to create the life and career you want. Write your answer after each of the following seven questions. If you want a copy of this planning sheet, check the web site at www.MarshaPetrieSue.com.

1. How is your industry doing? Good or bad?
2. When was the last time you went on the web site and read company press releases?
3. Did you read the company's annual report if you work for a public company?
4. Do you plan regular meetings with your leader to find out his or her perspective of the company and of you?
5. Do you independently determine the skills needed to make you indispensable?
6. Are you constantly polishing your skills to be a better person and employee?
7. Do you hold yourself accountable for every decision, outcome, success, and failure you have on your job?

A large component of deciding to decide is to begin with information. And that means that the choice of accepting and keeping a position is yours. No one holds a gun to your head; well, unless you are incarcerated perhaps. But more likely than not, the decision to work in a particular industry or study in a particular field is 100 percent your choice. So if you make that choice to take a job, make the decision to make the best of it. Your boss hired you to succeed, not to fail.

Like the housing, banking, and the stock market, many industries are cyclical and experience downturns every 7 to 10 years. So

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why don't most people plan for this day? Is it because of the money? Is it laziness or greed? Are you caught in this trap?

Some people stay in jobs they hate and continue to work for jerks. Why? It is easier not to take personal responsibility for their outcomes, and to just stay and whine. They have no clue that they *do* rule their world. They decide not to decide! How about you? Many people have a tremendous fear of change. Truth be known, we all want it just like it has always been, only better. Sorry, but better rarely involves the way it has always been. I believe that this is because fear comes with blame, and people don't want to be blamed for making a difficult or bad choice. The easy way out is to fall back on the "coulda, woulda, shoulda" scenario.

The best day of your life is the one on which you decide your life is your own. No apologies or excuses. No one to lean on, rely on, or blame. The gift is yours—it is an amazing journey—and you alone are responsible for the quality of it. This is the day your life really begins.

—Bob Moawad, author

Consider the following scenario:

Your boss, Jim, is a poor leader and always has been. As the tension in the company worsens due to the unstable economy, Jim's communication to you and the team is at an all-time low. You feel like you are floundering in turbulent seas and there is no one to rescue you. Projects are missing the deadlines and are typically overdue because of factors both inside and outside your control. You are frustrated and dread walking into the portals of the company every morning.

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Take It

The situation is intolerable and continues to degrade. The good people are leaving because of Jim's terrible leadership, and even his boss doesn't know what to do with him. You plan to keep your ear to the ground, and you know you will post for a new position within the company. You hope to move to another, saner area of the firm. You have promised yourself to keep your focus on your job, and not get tied up in all the office chatter. You choose to take it, and simply do your job to the best of your ability.

Leave It

You are ready to quit, and have updated your resume. You used a recent template from the Internet, visited sites like Jobing.com and Monster.com, and determined where your skills are best positioned. You're comfortable with the idea of leaving the industry, and you have already given yourself permission to move beyond your comfort zone. You decide to hand in your resignation.

Change It

You stretch your flexibility to manage your situation. The market is tight, and you are having a hard time convincing yourself to leave. You locate a download audio file through a Google search on how to deal with difficult people. The file gives you fresh approaches with Jim. You decide to change the situation by polishing your communications and your capability to deal with

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difficult people. You know that you must do everything to resolve your position. You pledge to yourself to be resilient and to take a new stance. You hone your listening skills, and you pay attention to every piece of information without adding to the emotion at hand.

Life is great. But without bad times, we wouldn't know the difference.

—Kermit the Frog, *Before You Leap*

After you decide which choice you will make, you step back and ask yourself this question: “So what’s my plan?” This is where the action starts. The strategy for each of the three choices—the TLCs—are where you decide what you will do now that the decision is made. Deciding to take it can create stress and mental havoc; leaving it means you are in a tentative job market; changing it is probably the soundest choice right now. But that’s just my humble opinion.

Deciding to decide is not a spectator sport. It is like setting a goal or making a New Year’s resolution, then stepping back and waiting for it to happen. I’ve done it, and you’ve done it; and at the end of the year you look back at those resolutions and realize that nothing has changed. It seems crazy to say, but I will anyway: when you decide to decide, you also have to decide to take action.

Use the worksheet in Figure 1.1 to help you move forward. Included are some issues to consider, but you need to add the issues and problems that will help you control more in your work and life. You get *your* turn in Figure 1.2.

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Issue	Take it	Leave it	Change it	What's your plan?
Discuss a pay increase	Stay where you are and don't make waves. When the industry improves, ask for a raise.	Pledge to yourself that within a month you will have your raise or quit.	Learn the best approach and practice. Keep a log of what you do and of your successes.	
Ask boss for higher level assignments	Wait and see if they notice you and give you the work.	Look for a new position that has the kinds of projects you enjoy.	Learn new skills that are needed for the top assignments.	
Boss manages poorly	Listen to others and determine if it is really the boss or you.	Find a new position.	Communicate with the boss offering candid and helpful advice.	
You manage poorly	Wait until someone tells you that you need to change, but stay aware of your management style.	Step down from your management position.	Tell your group you are working on a development plan and ask for their help.	
Your colleague has body odor	Buy a fan and room deodorizer. Leave a bar of soap on their desk.	Ask to have your desk moved.	Ask graciously if you can discuss a sensitive issue with them.	

Figure 1.1 Issues Worksheet

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Issue	Take it	Leave it	Change it	What's your plan?

Figure 1.2 Blank Worksheet

It's All About Them

Helping *other* people make better decisions will actually help you create the environment that breeds successful outcomes. People who bemoan most everything and those who have become victims of circumstance can suck the life out of any team or person. Learn to turn the TLC into an external communication tool. When they approach you, simply keep the focus on what you know works—and assertively communicate.

You know what I learned? I learned that I always have three choices. I can take it—which means that I'll work on not being stressed, because I *do* have a plan and realize that tomorrow will be better and different than today. The second choice I have is to leave it—which I find to be the most difficult choice, because it takes me to a place I've never been. I have to reject where I am, and jump out of my comfort zone. But it *is* a choice.

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The third choice I have is to change it. I have to look at my flexibility and willingness to learn a new approach. I find that usually this is the best choice, because I can rely on the skills I have or can polish them to move forward in a very positive fashion.

I call this the TLC of deciding to decide. What's *your* plan? Put the ball back in the other person's court, instead of buying into his or her misery.

Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail Better.

—Samuel Beckett, playwright

Deciding to decide is a mindset and a technique to help you move from the terrible loop of inactivity, negativity, resentment, and anger. Focusing on the possibilities and what, realistically, you can change is the cornerstone to living the Reactor Factor.

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