

Chronic Problems with Decision Making Academic Advising Issues Forum

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I. Introduction

- If you have examples, questions, please do not hesitate to ask.

II. Barriers

Barriers can occur for a variety of reasons, often intertwined, frequently not immediately obvious.

- a. **Information** - lack of knowledge, ignoring, making errors, exceed capacity to process information
- b. **Experience** - decision-making skills, lack of practice, unaware of decision making procedures
- c. **Social/relational factors** - family, partner, peer group, advisors: pressures, expectation, hidden agendas, lack of understanding
- d. **Personal/Emotional** - decision making style, cognitive factors, self-confidence, values, anxiety, fear.

*We'll focus on today on **SOCIAL and on PERSONAL / EMOTIONAL FACTORS***

1. Self-Awareness:

- i. Internal conflicts (motives, values, interests, abilities)
- ii. Conflicts with significant others (different agendas, pressures)
- iii. Conflict with advice givers [counselors, advisors, etc] (e.g., decision making styles differ, values differ, etc)

2. Lose sight of final goal or Over focused on Final Goal:

- i. Lose sight of final goal(s): we spend our time putting out small fires

- ii. Caught up in day to day crises, no sense of purpose, don't picture self as successful in the future. School environment pulls for this. No time to slow down and reflect.
- iii. Over focus on final goal -- Vladimir Horowitz syndrome: We hold up a master of a skill as our standard for our beginning abilities -- set ourself up for failure. We expect perfection *now*. Leads to overly self-critical, failure before begin.
- iv. 7 Habits of Highly Effective People (Steven Covey):

	Urgent	Not Urgent
Important	Crises Pressing problems Deadline Driven	Preparation Prevention Values Clarification Planning Relationship building True re-creation Empowerment
Not Important	Interruptions Phone calls, mail, meetings (some) Pressing matters Popular activities	Trivia, busywork Some phone calls, etc Irrelevant mail Time wasters "Escape" activities Excessive TV

3. Myths about decision making

Leads to paralyzing anxiety, fear of making a mistake:

- i. Nobody else is undecided, they've known since childhood .
- ii. No one else has the problems I am having.
- iii. Other people (or a test) know better what I should do.
- iv. Knowing what you want means you can do it well right from the beginning, automatically.
- v. You must analyze *all* aspects of a choice before implementing it. Be Prepared!
- vi. If things don't go the way I want them to, I am a failure.
- vii. If you have made the right choice, you won't feel uncertain.

4. Self-concept, Self-esteem, and SHAME:

Myths can be a window into this issue. A model of oneself: e.g., "I can't succeed." Deep and well-ingrained. It is a very personal and private issue -- the student experiences *shame* because s/he is unable to decide, to "just do it" -- it is likely s/he will not tell you the entire story of his/her problem.

- Western culture is very linear and rational.: "If you don't know where you are going, you'll probably end up someplace else."
- But nonlinearity is required for creative problem solving. E.g., *brainstorming*. "If you always know where you are going, you may never end up someplace else"
- Help our students feel comfortable with uncertainty, ambiguity, inconsistency, irrationality - the process of discovery involves these things, it is not just about making a decision now.

III. Red Flags

- a. Stated need for help
- b. Evidence of psychological disturbances (depression, anxiety, drug/alcohol abuse, factors that are interfering with their ability to make decisions)
- c. Decision making history, especially during times of stress, etc. This may be first time they have had to make decisions like this, so difficulty may be a skill deficit rather than a deeper underlying problem.
- d. Observable changes in outward behavior, esp decline (emotional, behavior, physical)
- e. Boundary issues - Reach boundary of your ability, or compromise your relationship
- f. Pay attention to **your** reactions (anxious?)
- g. When your assistance does not seem to have an impact - yes-buts, no follow-through, belief in myths.
- h. Your own comfort level with dealing with distress
- i. **Discussion:** what other red flags have you run into? How have you dealt with them?

IV. Conclusion

- a. Counseling Center resources:
 - In-person counseling (1:1, group)
 - Workshops

- Web site
- Consultation with you
- Each other. There is a lot of expertise in this room. It is too easy to feel isolated in this work.