



YOU ALWAYS HAVE A CHOICE, RIGHT?

One of my own mantras for several years has been 'you always have a choice.' This creed was born almost 20 years ago when I first got into contact with creative thinking. Before that, I was thinking according to the paradigm of economics which stated that every question has one logical answer, no discussion. Unfortunately, as I discovered, the world isn't a logical or rational place.

Thanks to creative thinking, I could always discover alternative solutions. From a mathematical point of view, the answer to the question $1 + 1$ has indeed one clear answer. But if you look at it from a more creative point of view, it could also be 11 putting the ones next to each other or it could become a plus-sign if you laid one horizontally on top of the other. There is not always one solution to a certain problem.

This new insight was quite a life-changing event for me. Suddenly it became

clear that you always have a choice. You can always choose a different alternative if your current situation isn't working anymore.

However, I don't have a choice in everything.

I can't choose the weather and I can't choose whether my partner will be in a good mood or not. That is of course true. But I can choose how I respond to the weather or the mood of my partner. Even in extreme cases - for example, a thief tries to steal money from me - I can make a decision: my money or my life. Or, I could try and disarm the aggressor, or find a way to escape or I don't intend going any further on theoretical discussions in these extreme situations.

In 99,9% of the cases, we have a lot more freedom of choice about the way we are thinking, feeling and the way we behave than we think.

You rarely have a choice

If you always make conscious life decisions, then why are so many people still stuck in situations that they don't like? Why are so many people (myself included) not living up to all their dreams when they can choose to attempt it. Why do many people (unconsciously) not make those choices? That's where our biology kicks in. Only some of our thoughts, feelings and behaviours are preceded by conscious intentions. Most of the time, we operate on an autopilot with our unconscious mind at the steering wheel. Our conscious brains can only handle roughly 40 bits of information a second, while our unconscious minds can handle 11 million bits of information per second *.

Our unconscious brain is fast, instinctive and emotional. The conscious part of the brain is slower, more deliberate and logical. Our unconscious brain cares about 2 things: survival and maintaining the status quo (because the status quo preserves energy, which increases the chances of survival). The decisions that our unconscious brain is making are highly context-dependent. Whatever is going on at that moment - the weather, your state of mind, the time of the day, the last thing you ate or saw or felt - can influence your thoughts and decisions.

Does this mean that your unconscious brain is sabotaging the conscious brain? No. It is simply a different system. But how can I make a conscious choice (and change my life for the long-term)?

Does this mean that I have to accept that my unconscious mind is always the master of my thoughts? Must I stop making conscious choices to improve my life (and get out of situations where I'm not happy)? Absolutely not. However, don't assume for a second that it will be easy. The 'trick' is to use the substantial power of the unconscious brain. How? By creating a clear pattern. Our brain is wired to create habits and if we do something often enough (especially if it's tied to an external cue and reward), it will become a second nature. It's not will-power or self-control that we need to focus on; it's all about consistency and perseverance.

Repeat a certain habit that you want to achieve. Jocelyn Campbell describes a 4-step process in her article '7 Self-Help Myths that are Keeping You Stuck':

1. Create an intention (be specific, have a clear vision of the outcome, set a deadline).

E.g. I want to lose 5 kg and will complete a 20 km run in August this year.

2. Determine how you are going to keep your focus on the intention. What's the cue that could trigger a certain habit? This is an important step because it's the moment that puts things into motion.

E.g. I will place my running shoes next to the bed before I go to sleep.

3. Identify what you will do when things don't go according to plan. Be sure that things will go awry - it's not easy to predict what can happen, but you can probably already imagine 3 or 4 scenarios that will make it harder to persevere your new habit.

E.g. if it's rainy, my first task for the day is to go to the gym and run on the treadmill.

4. Reward yourself when you follow through.

Eg. I will get a nice breakfast after my run.

You can reprogram your automatic behaviour so it aligns better with the conscious intentions of your life. Oftentimes, reframing certain habits isn't sexy or exciting, but you have to stick to the process, be patient and persevere.

"LIFE IS A MATTER OF CHOICES, AND EVERY CHOICE YOU MAKE MAKES YOU."

JOHN C. MAXWELL



THE ART OF CHOOSING

Sheena Iyengar studies how we make choices -- and how we feel about the choices we make. At TEDGlobal, she talks about both trivial choices (Coke vs. Pepsi) and profound ones, sharing her groundbreaking research that has uncovered some surprising attitudes about our decisions.



thechangemindset.video/artofchoosing



thechangemindset.video/hardchoices

HOW TO MAKE HARD CHOICES?

Here's a talk that could literally change your life. Which career should I pursue? Should I break up- or get married?! Where should I live? Big decisions like these can be agonizingly difficult. That's because we think about them the wrong way, says philosopher Ruth Chang. She offers a powerful new framework for shaping who we truly are.



thechangemindset.video/paradox-choice

THE PARADOX OF CHOICE

Psychologist Barry Schwartz takes aim at a central tenet of western societies: freedom of choice. In Schwartz's estimation, choice has made us not freer, but more paralyzed; not happier but more dissatisfied..