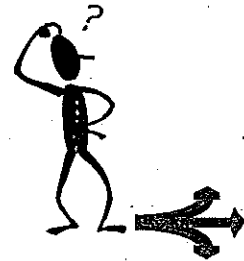


GUIDING WISE CHOICES

THE CONCEPT: In life, we often experience obstacles that threaten to get us off course from our goals and dreams. Some of these obstacles exist in the world, and some of them exist within us. The choices we make when encountering these obstacles determine the results we create in our lives. Effective Guides (whether Inner or Outer) assist us not only to overcome a particular obstacle, they also teach us the process of overcoming all obstacles. They do this by supporting us to see our actual obstacles (as opposed to imagined obstacles invented by Victims), by holding us personally responsible for addressing our real obstacles, by helping us to identify our best choices, and by encouraging us to act on our best options.

HOW TO GUIDE WISE CHOICES:

1. Your purpose in the Wise-Choice process is two-fold. First, you will assist your partner to take a positive action toward resolving a present problem. Second, and more importantly, you will assist your partner to learn a powerful process for making wise choices in all future difficult situations.
2. Occasionally you will need to guide someone who is experiencing emotional distress. Until a person achieves emotional balance, identifying positive options (which is a mental process) is very difficult. Therefore when the other person is upset, first acknowledge and empathize with his/her feelings by reflecting: "You seem really sad about this... I can see how angry this makes you.... How are you feeling about all this?" Healthy emotions, like storms, eventually pass. Reflecting feelings often moves the storm through more quickly.
3. With an emotionally calm partner, use the following steps of the Wise-Choice Process to guide him or her to the selection of one or more positive options. Feel free to adapt the language of each step to your own style. Use your best active listening skills.



THE WISE CHOICE PROCESS

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| 1. WHAT'S YOUR PRESENT SITUATION? | <i>Identify the problem or difficulty.</i> |
| 2. HOW WOULD YOU LIKE IT TO BE? | <i>Specify your goal (desired outcome).</i> |
| 3. WHAT ARE YOUR POSSIBLE CHOICES? | <i>Without evaluating, make a list of options.</i> |
| 4. WHAT'S THE LIKELY OUTCOME OF EACH CHOICE? | <i>Missing information? Stop and get more.</i> |
| 5. WHICH CHOICE(S) WILL YOU COMMIT TO DOING? | <i>Make a promise to yourself.</i> |
| 6. WHEN & HOW WILL YOU ASSESS YOUR PLAN? | <i>Evaluate your results.</i> |

Keep in mind that this process is not about giving advice. As Harry Truman once said, the best way to give advice is to find out what someone intends to do and then advise them to do it.

WISE CHOICE MODEL

You are about to learn a system that will empower you to take full responsibility for creating your life as you want it to be despite the inevitable challenges that life presents.

- 1. WHAT'S MY PRESENT SITUATION?** Begin by identifying your problem or challenge, being sure to define the situation as a Creator, not as a Victim. The important information here is "What exists?" (not "Whose fault is it?"). Quiet your Inner Critic, that self-criticizing voice in your head: *I am a total loser in my history class.* Likewise, ignore your Inner Defender, that judgmental voice that blames everyone else for your problems: *My history instructor is the worst teacher on the planet.* Instead, rely on your Inner Guide, your wise, impartial inner voice that tells the truth as best it can. Consider only the objective facts of your situation, including how you feel about them. For example:

I stayed up all night studying for my first history test. When I finished taking the test, I hoped for an A. At worst, I expected a B. When I got the test back, my grade was a D. Five other students got A's. I feel depressed and angry.

By the way, sometimes when we accurately define a troublesome situation, we immediately know what to do. The problem wasn't so much the situation as our muddled understanding of it.

- 2. HOW WOULD I LIKE MY SITUATION TO BE?** You can't change the past, but if you could create your desired outcome in the future, what would it look like?

I would like to get A's on all of my future tests.

- 3. WHAT ARE MY POSSIBLE CHOICES?** Create a list of possible choices that you *could* do, knowing you aren't obligated to do any of them. Compile your list without judgment. Don't say, "Oh, that would never work." Don't even say, "That's a great idea." Judgment during brainstorming stops the creative flow. Move from judgments to possibilities, discovering as many creative options as you can. Give yourself time to ponder, explore, consider, think, discover, conceive, invent, imagine. Then dive even deeper. If you get stuck, try one of these options. First, take a different point of view. Think of someone you admire and ask, "What would that person do in my situation?" Or, pretend your problem belongs to someone else. What advice would you give them? Third, incubate. That is, set the problem aside and let your unconscious mind work on a solution while you do other things. Sometimes a great option will pop into your mind while you are brushing your hair, doing math homework, or even sleeping. Your patience will often pay off with a helpful option that would have remained invisible had you accepted the first idea that came to mind or, worse, given up.

- *I could complain to my history classmates and anyone else who will listen.*
- *I could drop the class and take it next semester with another instructor.*

I am the cause of my choices, decisions, and actions. It is I who chooses, decides, and acts. If I do so knowing my responsibility, I am more likely to proceed wisely and appropriately than if I make myself oblivious of my role as source.

Nathaniel Branden

- *I could complain to the department head that the instructor grades unfairly.*
- *I could ask my successful classmates for help.*
- *I could ask the instructor for suggestions about improving my grades.*
- *I could read about study skills and experiment with some new ways to study.*
- *I could request an opportunity to retake the test.*
- *I could take all of the online practice quizzes.*
- *I could get a tutor.*

4. WHAT'S THE LIKELY OUTCOME OF EACH POSSIBLE CHOICE?

Decide how you think each choice is likely to turn out. If you can't predict the outcome of one of your possible choices, stop this process and gather any additional information you need. For example, if you don't know the impact that dropping a course will have on your financial aid, find out before you take that action. Here are the possible choices from Step 3 and their likely outcomes:

- *Complain to history classmates: I'd have the immediate pleasure of criticizing the instructor and maybe getting others' sympathy.*
- *Drop the class: I'd lose three credits this semester and have to make them up later.*
- *Complain to the department head: Probably she'd ask if I've seen my instructor first, so I wouldn't get much satisfaction.*
- *Ask successful classmates for help: I might learn how to improve my study habits; I might also make new friends.*
- *Ask the instructor for suggestions: I might learn what to do next time to improve my grade; at least the instructor would learn that I want to do well in this course.*
- *Read about study skills: I would probably learn some strategies I don't know and maybe improve my test scores in all of my classes.*
- *Request an opportunity to retake the test: My request might get approved and give me an opportunity to raise my grade. At the very least, I'd demonstrate how much I want to do well.*
- *Take all of the online practice quizzes: This action wouldn't help my grade on this test, but it would probably improve my next test score.*
- *Get a tutor: A tutor would help, but it would probably take a lot of time.*

A person defines and redefines who they are by the choices they make, minute to minute.

Joyce Chapman

Destiny is not a 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 Bryant

5. WHICH CHOICE(S) WILL I COMMIT TO DOING? Now create your plan. Decide which choice or choices will likely create your desired outcome; then commit to acting on them. If no favorable option exists, consider which choice leaves you no worse off than before. If no such option exists, then ask which choice creates the least unfavorable outcome.

I'll talk to my successful classmates, make an appointment with my instructor and have him explain what I could do to improve, and I'll request an opportunity to retake the test. I'll read the study skills sections of On Course and implement

at least three new study strategies. If these choices don't raise my next test score to at least a B, I'll get a tutor.

Each situation will dictate the best options. In the example above, if the student had previously failed four tests instead of one, the best choice might be to drop the class. Or, if everyone in the class were receiving D's and F's, and if the student had already met with the instructor, a responsible option might be to see the department head about the instructor's grading policies.

6. WHEN AND HOW WILL I EVALUATE MY PLAN? At some future time you will want to evaluate your results. To do so, compare your new situation to how you want it to be (as you described in Step 2). If the two situations are identical (or close enough), you can call your plan a success. If you find that you are still far from your desired outcome, you have some decisions to make. You might decide that you haven't implemented your new approach long enough, so you'll keep working your plan. Or you may decide that your plan just isn't working, in which case you'll return to Step 1 and work through Step 5 to design a plan that will work better. However, you're not starting completely over because this time you're smarter than you were when you began: Now you know what doesn't work.

After my next history test, I'll see if I have achieved my goal of getting an A. If not, I'll revise my plan.

The principle of choice describes the reality that I am in charge of my life. I choose it all. I always have, I always will.

Will Schutz

Here's the bottom line: Our choices reveal what we *truly* believe and value, as opposed to what we *say* we believe and value. When I submissively wait for others to improve my life, I am being a Victim. When I passively wait for luck to go my way, I am being a Victim. When I make choices that take me off course from my future success just to increase my immediate pleasure (such as partying instead of studying for an important test), I am being a Victim. When I make choices that sacrifice my goals and dreams just to reduce my immediate discomfort (such as dropping a challenging course instead of spending extra hours working with a tutor), I am being a Victim.

However, when I design a plan to craft my life as I want it, I am being a Creator. When I carry out my plan even in the face of obstacles (such as when the campus bookstore runs out of a book I need for class and I keep up with my assignments by reading a copy the instructor has placed on reserve in the library), I am being a Creator. When I take positive risks to advance my goals (such as asking a question in a large lecture class even though I am nervous), I am being a Creator. When I sacrifice immediate pleasure to stay on course toward my dreams (such as resisting the urge to buy a new cell phone so I can reduce my work hours to study more), I am being a Creator.

No matter what your final decision may be, the mere fact that you are defining and making your own choices is wonderfully empowering. By participating in the

Wise Choice Process, you affirm your belief that you *can* change your life for the better. You reject the position that you are merely a Victim of outside forces, a pawn in the chess game of life. You insist on being the Creator of your own outcomes and experiences, shaping your destiny through the power of wise choices.

JOURNAL ENTRY

6

In this activity you will apply the Wise Choice Process to improve a difficult situation in your life. Think about a current problem, one that you're comfortable sharing with your classmates and teacher. As a result of this problem, you may be angry, sad, frustrated, depressed, overwhelmed, or afraid. Perhaps this situation has to do with a grade you received, a teacher's comment, or a classmate's action. Maybe the problem relates to a relationship, a job, or money. The Wise Choice Process can help you make an empowering choice in any part of your life.

- 1.** Write the six questions of the Wise Choice Process and answer each one as it relates to your situation.

The Wise Choice Process

1. What's my present situation? (Describe the problem objectively and completely.)
2. How would I like my situation to be? (What is your ideal future outcome?)
3. What are my possible choices? (Create a long list of specific choices that might create your preferred outcome.)
4. What's the likely outcome of each possible choice? (If you can't predict the likely outcome of an option, stop and gather more information.)
5. Which choice(s) will I commit to doing? (Pick from your list of choices in Step 3.)
6. When and how will I evaluate my plan? (Identify specifically the date and criteria by which you will determine the success of your plan.)

- 2.** Write what you learned or relearned by doing the Wise Choice Process. Be sure to Dive Deep. You might begin, *By doing the Wise Choice Process, I learned that I...*

Remember, you can enliven your journal by adding pictures cut from magazines, drawings of your own, clip art, or quotations that appeal to you.

When I see all the choices I really have, it makes the world a whole lot brighter.

Debbie Scott, student

from Downing, S. (2011). ON COURSE. (6th ed.) Wadsworth.