

Hard Evidence

The first step in making life-changing decisions, even the most personal and emotional ones, without regret is research. Research fuels your decisions by yielding the information on which you can base a sound decision. This is similar to a court case in which the lawyer's job is to present the evidence on which the jury will make a decision and the judge will hand down a verdict. The case is no stronger than the evidence that is gathered. The strategy for the trial is formulated on the evidence.

In choosing relationships, make yourself a hard jury, one that is not easily convinced and that requires concrete information before reaching a decision. The verdict rendered by your decision may alter the quality of your life. It is better to lengthen the deliberation process and insure that the decision is appropriate than to reach a hasty conclusion that traumatizes all those involved.

To those of us who often procrastinate on the decision because we feel intimidated by lack of education or any area of weakness, I would relieve you with this statement: It is not how much you know that arms you with the tools of great decision making, but rather how much you *ask*. Ask questions. The most intellectual people I've ever met were people who asked questions of science, art, religion, that most others took for granted. You can never know more than you are willing to ask.

A friend of mine who is a college professor tells me that usually his brightest students ask the most questions. In fact, he tells his pupils on the first day of class that there are no stupid questions in his classroom. He works hard to create a safe environment for inquiry, due diligence, reflection, and problem solving. The smart ones ask question after question and end up challenging and educating the teacher. What we often characterize as the terrible twos when a toddler runs behind a mother asking why, why, why, is nothing more than her active mind accelerating at a remarkable rate, accumulating,

Passive Decisions

Knowing who you are and what you want is vital to participating in a successful relationship. While it seems counterintuitive to focus on who you are versus on who the two of you are as a couple, the whole is only as strong as the parts. This is especially true for women. Women have made tremendous gains in our society. After all, it's not uncommon for a woman to be a CEO, a race car driver, or even, a presidential candidate. Yet, our society, advertising, TV shows and popular books and magazines still suggest that a woman who is accommodating and demure is far more acceptable and desirable than one who speaks her mind and asks for what she wants.

Truly successful and mutually beneficial relationships are based on each party being truthful and upfront about their real wants, desires and feelings. While certainly as a couple, you must make decisions together, decisions about who you are as a person and what you want your life to be, are yours alone to make. Allowing someone else, a relationship partner, a friend, a parent or anyone else to make decisions for you is a mistake. When you let someone else decide who you are and what you want, you give away the power that God gave to you.

And doing nothing is not making a decision. Sitting back and pretending not to see a situation for what it is, or procrastinating about what to do until something happens where you have no choice but to go one way or another, is just as bad as letting others make decisions for you. It's passive, and in the end won't likely serve you very well. Sometimes circumstances are what they are, but you always have the choice to decide who you want to be within them.

categorizing, and regurgitating the accumulated data based on the questions that she dares to ask.

We must never attempt to silence that toddler within each of us that continues to question our adult surroundings and selections. That inquisitive process often leads me to consider factors I had never before considered. With my real estate purchase, I had taken a crash course in real estate—asking questions about those twenty-odd houses. I came to understand the laws of zoning and planning in our city. I knew a little more about architectural design. Terms like “finish out” were now part of my vocabulary. Fair market value and comparables were now in my vocabulary because I kept asking “why?” before I made a decision to buy a home that would leave me with a note for the next twenty years.

If you are to make decisions that you will never regret, then you must be willing to think through all the criteria—professional and personal, scientific and subjective, data-driven and self-satisfying. Much of the anxiety and later regret that comes from the weight of your decisions can be alleviated or avoided altogether if you assemble all your information--that which is clearly consequential as well as what may seem inconsequential--before you do.