

GO COACH YOURSELF!

A self-coaching guide to joining the
professional well-being revolution.

Roger Alan Cohen



Chapter 3

Deciding to Decide

If, when, how and...

There are **four critical decisions that you have to make** for every important thing in your life:

- 1 - Decide **if** you are going to make a decision about it.
- 2 - Decide **when** you will make the decision (or recognise that you will not make it)
- 3 - Decide **how** you are going to make the decision
- 4 - Make **the decision** itself.

I imagine that you already have enough difficulties when making decisions, and suddenly I'm multiplying your problems by four! What a nice guy I am, right? Well... I'm going to be even worse, and use that typical, worldwide parental saying: "I'm doing this for your own good. Believe me; you'll thank me for it one day."

Don't worry, I won't just leave you like this. We are going to solve a good portion of this multiplied problem right now.

Regarding the first decision that needs to be made, you

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will simply need to prioritise which decisions are the most important for your life, and if some of the others could just be left to other people or to chance.

Even among the issues that you do decide to make a decision about -i.e. the ones who have passed the first filter-, now you should prioritise which ones you should dedicate time and effort to now, and which ones should be left until later. This second decision, the “when”, is critical. Some people overwhelm themselves with as many decisions to make as possible and decide to tackle the ninety nine minor decisions first, in an unconscious attempt to procrastinate in making the most important ones. You should be very careful about this and be honest with yourself about whether you are trapped in this game. It's just not true that you need to make these tiny decisions now so that you can make your mind clearer for tackling that big decision later. You will always find some new tiny decisions to add to this procrastination game.

As you started with one problem, and I multiplied it by four, let me at least help you to solve one of the two remaining decisions from the list. That way, you will finish much as you started in terms of the amount of decisions which you have to make, but you will be much wiser than before in terms of which issues you should decide about, when and how.

Imagine if you went to a library and tried to choose a book without even thinking about what type of book you might be looking for beforehand. How would you choose what to read?

a) Would you pick up book after book and read the blurb

on each cover to decide if that's the one which you want to take home? In the best case scenario, this would take 5 minutes per book. After one hundred books, you would have probably found one which you find acceptable; not the perfect one, as there would still be thousands of potentially better books that you weren't able to evaluate in the time you had available. Result: 500 minutes later (8 hours without rest!), you would have one potentially good option (not perfect, but good).

b) Would you select or pre-select book/s by their title or the nice design on their spine, and bypass the burden of having to read the blurb? Result: many more books would have been evaluated, but this method is much less effective for finding a book which you would actually want to read (the title, the name of the author, and/or the colors and fonts used on the spine are not great indicators of the content of a book).

c) Would you just pick one totally randomly and start reading it? And if you didn't like it would you abandon it and start again with a new one? Result: perhaps by chance you would find your perfect book, but the chances are so small that it would be better to find another method!

d) Would you ask what the most popular book is that people are borrowing at the moment and just copy them? Result: If your taste matches that of the other people who have borrowed the book, then you could have found your perfect read with ease, but it is far from certain.

e) Would you ask the librarian to recommend you a book? That's quite a good idea! They would need to ask you

questions in order to make a recommendation: genre of book, length, language, etc... And based on your answers, and their professionalism, the librarian could help you to make an educated choice.

This last option would require some reflection time from you, but it really is worth it. The chances are much higher than with any of the other methods that you would obtain the best results and it would take you less time to get there. An alternative would be for you to do all this reflection by yourself and then make your choice among the limited range of pre-selected books which correspond with your choice criteria.



For your professional decisions, the same applies: you need to follow a systematic, inside-out process to make the best possible decisions. You can do this by yourself or with the help of a professional coach. As you are reading this

book, you have already started out on this journey, and the remaining chapters will provide you with a systematic process for pre-screening the overwhelming number of possibilities which are out there in the professional world, so that you only take the path which will help you to achieve professional well-being. It is both possible and effective to do this alone, but some people prefer to benefit from the experience, methodology, and drive that a well-prepared career coach can bring in the same way that some people may ask the the librarian to guide their thinking to help them choose a book. If it is financially feasible, and you have the time available, I would definitely recommend that you seek help from a career coach, either now or after having completed this book. However, if you are not ready or able to do that at the moment, this book is your second best alternative!

How do you make your decisions? Below, you will find some examples of situations which would require you to make a decision. Please note down the letters which correspond to the answers that you choose along the way:

1. You've been invited to a restaurant by a friend and you're looking at the menu. How do you make your choice?

- You choose the only dish that's right for you. (A)
- You have the same thing as your friend. (B)
- You can't decide. (C)
- You wait for the maître d' to suggest something. (D)
- You choose the dish that sounds nicest. (E)
- Other. (F)

2. You have prepared an hour long presentation, and are then told that you will only have half an hour. What do you do?

- You don't know how to select which content to keep.
- Everything seems important, and you get so annoyed that you are paralysed. (C)
- You ask your superior which areas need to be prioritised. (D)
- You really like the first part of your presentation, so you delete the rest. (E)
- You delete everything except for the section titles. (A)
- You follow the same criteria as your colleagues. (B)
- Other. (F)

3. You're in a city for the first time and have to choose a hotel. How do you proceed?

- You go where your travel agent booked a room for you. (D)
- You choose the hotel that was recommended by a friend. (B)
- On your tablet, you choose the cheapest one among the 4 star hotels. (A)
- You like the look of a hotel advertised in a flyer, so you go there. (E)
- You don't know whether it's better to go to the centre, to be closer to everything but where it's louder, or to go to the outskirts to be able to sleep well, but be far from the shops. You spend 2 hours hesitating at the station. (C)
- Other. (F)

Now take a look at your answers. The letters correspond with the following types of decision making:

A. Elimination: This method is useful when you need to measure options against several criteria. You start with the criterion which is most important to you and decide which option fulfils it the least. Eliminate this option, continue onto

the next most important criterion and repeat the process until you only have one option remaining.

B. Imitation: It can be useful to employ this method when someone who you trust, for example a friend or a colleague, has had to make, or is in the process of making, a similar decision. When you make the same choice as them, the fact that someone you trust has had a good experience with this option might give you some confidence that it is likely to be successful.

C. Not deciding: There are times when decisions are just too difficult and you can't choose. Or they are not important enough to be worth the hassle. In any case, not deciding is already a decision.

D. Making someone else decide: If you know of someone who has more authority than you over a particular situation, or a strength in a particular area, it can be useful to ask them to make a decision for you. Either because they are the one who you are accountable to, or because they have unique skills which enable them to see clearly which decision is best. What I wouldn't want you to think is that by doing this, you have transferred your responsibility for this decision; you should stay accountable for its consequences, as you are the one who has chosen to make someone else decide. You have even decided who should do it.

E. Impulsively, by intuition: When a decision isn't too important, or when all of the options really do seem to be equally good (or bad), choosing what feels right might be a good way of making a decision quickly, without making the situation over-complicated for no reason. My suggestion on this is to be careful about your intuition: it is

not something magical but rather a way of calling on the knowledge that you have within, but which isn't explicitly ordered. Consequently, you should only trust your intuition when you are making a decision in an area where you have a wealth of experience. Otherwise, it's not intuition, it's just randomly taking a leap into the dark.

F. Other: There are plenty of other ways to make decisions, but I have limited this exercise to just a few of them. So that you have a more complete list, here are some further examples of decision making methods that you might have used if you selected "Other" as an answer:

- **Consulting** – Ask a number of people who you trust for advice and use the information that you gather to help you make the final decision.
- **Consensus** – Talk the choices over with a group of people until everyone agrees on one decision.
- **Voting** – Discuss the options with a group of people and then call for a vote.
- **Brainstorming** - This is based on the idea that the more solutions there are available, the more likely it is that one of them will be suitable for your situation. Note down all of the ideas that come to mind regardless of how useful (or not) they seem. At the end, look down your list to see if one option leaps out as being the best.
- **Use a decision making tool** - A number of people have come up with more systematic methods for making decisions. Some of these will be demonstrated later on in this book, but a quick internet search should reveal some other ways of helping you to decide.

The point of the questions in the exercise above is not to demonstrate that you always make decisions in the same way, and then put you in a box with a label on it that describes what type of decision maker you are. In fact, it's quite unlikely that you used the same decision making process for each of the three scenarios because they are all quite different situations. For instance, at work you might be more likely to defer to a higher authority because you are not completely in control over what you are doing, but in a restaurant, you might know exactly what you want and decide quickly. In addition to no two situations being alike, no two people are alike either, and at OrientaEuro, when we ask the questions above to a group, almost everybody arrives at a different set of answers.

Let's go back in time and reflect upon the following:

Which decision making strategy/ies did you use when choosing what subject/s to study? Why did you make your decision using this strategy? What do you now think should have been your decision making strategy at that time? (Please note that I'm not asking you about which option you chose but about *how* you chose it)

What about your first job?

What about the last time you changed jobs?

What about the job, or your own venture, that you'll move on to next? Really, which decision making strategy would make sense to you? Which way of making choices will give you the highest levels of confidence, motivation and drive, and the highest probability of achieving what you are looking for?

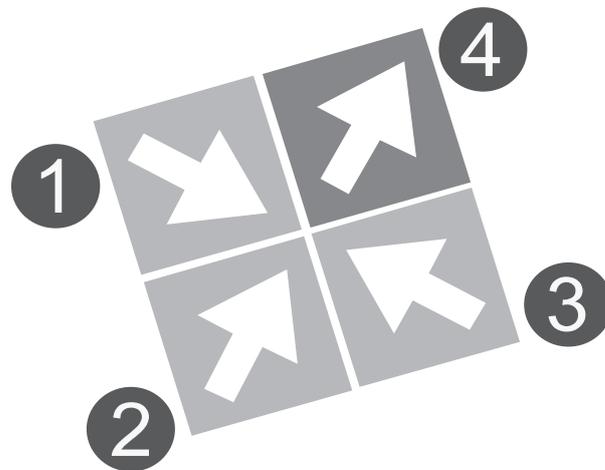
Later on in this book, I'm going to show you a method that is very effective and has been adopted by hundreds of our clients at OrientaEuro. It's part of the systematic approach that you are going to follow throughout this book.

Chapter 4

The 4 Arrows

A systematic, inside-out approach

OriantaEuro's systematic, inside-out approach is a trademark, both figuratively and literally. It has proven to be so effective that we use it in each of our services, and it has become such an essential part of our identity that it is even embedded in our logo! Each of the four arrows represents a stage in the process. By following each of the stages through in turn, this process will help to you find your professional well-being and ensure that it is sustainable, by providing a methodical way of looking at yourself, considering the external reality around you, and implementing well-educated decisions:



1. Self-awareness

What are your strengths, weaknesses, values, priorities and goals? This first stage comes from inside you, and it's not as easy as it sounds, to clearly identify who you are, but it is necessary in order to proceed. To help you with this, you will find a variety of different tools throughout this book such as tests, cards, exercises, etc... These will act as triggers, but they will not give you definitive answers - ultimately those come from within you. When you participate in a coaching programme with a qualified and experienced coach, the most powerful tool that they have is their ability to ask challenging questions which you wouldn't ask yourself in the same way. This book aims to help you get over that hurdle and ask those questions without the assistance of a coach. It won't be quite as effective, but it is still possible to trigger the answers that you need to understand yourself better whilst working alone. And once you really know yourself well, you can move on to the second stage.

2. External reality

In this step, you begin to take into account the world around you. What is needed, and what is valued by the society that you live in? Each of these things can be an opportunity for you to use your talents and your passions.

You can only attempt this stage once you have a greater knowledge of yourself, because otherwise it can be overwhelming! It is impossible to assess all of the options that are available in the world around you, one at a time, to see if they would be a good fit with what you want to achieve (it's like the first methods that we analysed in the

last chapter, regarding the books at the library). Instead, it is much easier and more effective to approach this the other way around; once you have learned about yourself, then you have some tools available to you which you can use to ensure that you only look at the options that resonate with who you are and who you want to be.

3. Decision making

Now you are at the point in the process where you can use what you have learned in the first two stages to make some decisions about the meaningful opportunities which are available to you. Later on in the book, you will find a method to help you make educated decisions. This takes the form of a decision-making matrix which allows you to evaluate the choice criteria that you will decide upon in the 'self-awareness' stage against the meaningful opportunities which you will have researched in the 'external reality' stage. This then helps you to make concrete decisions about which direction you want your career to head in.

Finally, you will finish this stage by creating a concrete, SMART action plan (SMART: containing Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-based actions). This involves dividing the main objective into actionable steps. In addition, you will decide why, when, and how you will implement each step, as well as how to know when it has been completed.

4. Effective implementation

The action plan comes from within you, because you will know what you want to achieve, why you want to achieve it, and how it is based on and consistent with your strengths.

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As a result, you will have the motivation, drive and self-confidence to implement it. However, there will be some unforeseen difficulties. Getting results doesn't just depend on you, as there will be external factors at work too. You will need to evaluate your results and re-adjust your plan as you go along, and you will need to maintain your drive and motivation as there will inevitably be some small failures. This means that you will need to learn to celebrate small successes along the way as well.

In short, the process works like this: after passing through the first three stages, you will have created a concrete action plan. You start by getting to know yourself better, which allows you to create some choice criteria to evaluate the meaningful opportunities that are available to you. Then, through looking at the external reality, you learn which of these opportunities are the most meaningful for you to evaluate. Putting both of these steps together allows you to make decisions about which opportunities you want to pursue, and finally, in the fourth stage, you implement these decisions. At the end of this journey, your talents, your passions, and the meaningful opportunities which are open to you will be aligned. In this way, you will be making a living out of your talents and passions, which will add value to the lives of others as well, thereby giving you sustainable professional (and personal) well-being. In this way, the three circles which I introduced you to in chapter 2 will be aligned.

Chapter 5

Self-awareness

Your foundations

In the previous chapters, you have seen an overview of the coaching process and how it works. So, now is the time to begin the real work! By the end of this chapter, you will have discovered what your strengths and weaknesses are, and decided on some choice criteria, which you can then use to evaluate different career paths that you will identify later on in the book.

Yesterday, I had my first coaching session. The coach gave me a pile of cards, and on each one there was a skill. The objective of the exercise was to categorise each card by skills which I think I have, skills which I think I don't have, and skills which I am unsure about. To my great surprise, the positive group was enormous! I really hadn't expected this, so much so that I asked for a photo to be taken. Then, I had to re-classify the cards which I had placed in the 'uncertain' group, and ended up placing a good many of them in

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the positive group! After this first session, I feel stronger, like I'm growing wings! I feel more confident to continue thinking about and shaping my plan! Thank you!

This is a post that one of OrientaEuro's coaching clients, Sylvie Mejblum, posted on her Facebook wall after her first session, and it illustrates a potential "side effect" of self-awareness: a boost in self-confidence and motivation. I have dedicated this chapter to self-awareness as it is the foundation for everything else that we will build.

In 1955, the psychologists Joseph Luft and Harrington Ingham created a technique known as "The Johari window". It presents an idea of four quadrants, which form the combinations of what you know and do not know about yourself, and of what the people around you know or do not know about you:



Are you taking advantage of the information that the people around you could give you about yourself? Are you willing to really listen to them? What do you fear

that you might discover? What do you try to hide from others? Why? Does this “concealment” upset you? How much effort does it cost you to present a different self-image to the world? What do you feel you are hiding in your professional role when you think that hiding benefits you? At which workplace could you be yourself without feeling the need to hide anything? Is this factor important to you? Write the answers that you find to this long set of questions here, for yourself:

In addition to the things that you keep hidden from people, others will know things about you which you don't. But how do you find out what those things are? For that, you should ask the people around you.

Ask as many people as possible that know you from different places and different contexts about their opinion of your skills and your suitability for different occupations. Take into account, and let them know, that this is an exercise about opinions, so don't take their answers as a critique, just as a great enabler to open up new paths of reflection. During these interviews,

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take notes so as to not lose any potentially important information, and also to show your appreciation for the person who is helping you out and the insight that they are giving you. Try to go as deep as possible using open questions, so as to discover replies to the following:

- What do they think are your main strengths? (in the different contexts that they are able to answer about)
- What makes them think so? (ask them to provide concrete examples if possible)
- What do they think are your main weaknesses?
- What makes them think so? (again, ask them to provide concrete examples if possible)
- If they had to guess, in which occupation can they imagine you would be the most fulfilled?
- Why do they think so?
- Is there another occupation that they can imagine you being fulfilled in?

Once you have finished your set of interviews and have all the answers, please reflect on them and use the spaces below to take note of:

Any surprising things

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