

**Inspired Life**

# Stumped? Try these seven strategies for making smart, confident decisions

By **Natasha Burton** April 7 at 6:00 AM

As I've gotten older, I've somehow become less capable of making a decision — or at least feeling confident while doing so. From pressing matters like a job offer to trivial choices (What *should* I have for dinner?), making a decision sometimes feels impossible.

Sound familiar? Here are seven ways to ease the decision-making process — and become more self-assured about every choice you make:

## **1. Pay Attention to Your Emotions**

You've likely heard the advice to "trust your gut." But if it were that easy, you wouldn't be hemming and hawing over decisions. Sherianna Boyle, author of *The Four Gifts of Anxiety*, says trusting your gut is no different from trusting your emotions — so start there.

"Your emotions are a guidepost," she explains. "Anxiety is your body's attempt to direct you back to yourself so you can receive information that is more accurate. When we act impulsively or react quickly, very often this information is tainted with fear."

Pfeffer has a great solution: what she calls the "if it's not a definite yes, it's a no" trick. "If there's any doubt about the decision and it doesn't feel like a *yes, yes, yes*, don't do it," she advises.

## **2. Take Your Time**

We might associate being decisive with choosing quickly, but [research shows](#) that taking pause can result in a better decision. "When making decisions, check your 'sense of urgency meter' — the feeling you must do

something now,” says success coach Jaime Pfeffer, author of the upcoming book *Uplift: Amazingly Powerful Secrets to Conquer Stress, Boost Happiness, and Create an Extraordinary Life*.

“If it’s high — and you’re unable to focus on anything else and feeling on edge — anxiety has likely kicked in. This is a red flag to step away from the decision for now: Excessive worry and fear actually cloud your judgment and often result in faulty decisions made in haste,” she says. Pfeffer suggests going for a walk or doing an activity you enjoy to distract yourself before making a snap decision.

### **3. Think Strategically**

Perhaps you’re more of a logical thinker than one to “feel through” a decision. “There are several strategies to promote clarity, such as thinking in a [different] language — if you happen to speak another — and considering the situation as a third party,” says career development expert Kate Wilson. “Each of these strategies works to help remove emotion and clarify your understanding of the situation.”

Even something as seemingly benign as a well-lit room can affect decision making: [A study from the University of Toronto Scarborough](#) showed that our emotions are more intense when we’re exposed to brightness.

John M. Crossman, who regularly speaks to college students about leadership and business, suggests gathering information. “Part of it is knowing more about the issue [you’re facing], which should give you more confidence,” he explains. “The other part is understanding what is driving your belief system.”

Knowing everything you can about the situation you face — as well as yourself — will give you the confidence that you’re making the right decision.

### **4. Ask Who You’re Trying to Please**

Many times, the decisions we make don’t affect us alone. “One of the reasons that people are indecisive is because they’re trying to please more than one person at the same time,” says relationship expert April Masini. You may be trying to make a decision that “a spouse or parent will be proud of, but it’s not the way you’ve wanted your life to go,” Masini said. “Decisions will not come easily because you’re serving two masters — or trying to.”

Understanding your motivations and whom you might please (or disappoint) as a result of your decision — and weighing those outcomes — will help you move forward in the process.

## **5. Banish Your Perfection Mindset**

Some people are paralyzed by a fear of failing. “We’re afraid we’ll fail and lose something — usually time, effort, and/or money — or we’re afraid we’ll succeed, not be ready for what happens next, and then fail,” says RM Harrison, a business strategist.

Having what he calls a “perfection mindset” — the belief that we must have everything figured out all at once and that there can’t be any room for mistakes — is the root of these fears.

The solution? Replace the perfection mindset with “the belief that errors and mistakes are actually *required*,” he says. When you account for the fact that there will always be hiccups and setbacks no matter what decisions you make, you can plan for them and be more prepared when they inevitably arise.

## **6. Let Go of Bad Decisions**

“The majority of indecisive people struggle to let go of past mistakes,” says life coach Brenden Dilley, author of [\*Still Breathin’: The Wisdom & Teachings of a Perfectly Flawed Man\*](#). “Failure after failure grooms them to second guess, overanalyze and thoroughly dissect every decision they make. Eventually, they become paralyzed every time they’re confronted with a decision.”

Build your trust in yourself by not only forgiving yourself for your past mistakes (and poor decisions) but also by acknowledging when you’ve made a good decision in the past. Murray agrees, noting that “every decision is an opportunity to learn and grow.”

After making your choice, continue the process by analyzing the aftermath. “Validate the decision, affirm the very act of making a decision, and trust that whatever the outcome was, you did your best,” she advises. “Create a safe, compassionate environment for yourself so that every decision does not carry life-or-death, all-or-nothing outcomes.”

## **7. Visualize Possible Outcomes**

Another option is to envision what might come as a result of your decision, Laurel Clark, author of *The Law of Attraction and Other Secrets of Visualization*. “By visualizing the probable outcomes, it is much easier to foresee the good or not-so-good consequences,” she explains.

If you're the type who likes to see things on paper, use a journal to work through a decision. "I encourage individuals to begin identifying the positives and negatives, as well as to note any thoughts or feelings they might have as they work through the process," Murray says. "If any anxiety spikes, take note of where and when and why. Does one decision leave you feeling unsettled or anxious? Does another decision leave you feeling hopeful, peaceful, or excited inside? This is usually your inner voice giving you clues as to what decision is best for you."

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