

How decisive are you?

Even minor daily decisions shape your life. Learn to sharpen your say-so skills By Hilary Davidson

I WAS ONLY SHOPPING for a gift bouquet, but I ended up ordering the flowers for my wedding reception. It was five years ago, and I'd ducked into a local flower shop. While waiting to place my order, I leafed through the booklet at the counter; when it was my turn, I told the florist I'd like her to do the centrepieces for the party. She asked when I'd like to come in for an appointment. Naively, I asked why we couldn't do it right then. "I'm sorry, but I don't have time this afternoon. But I have an hour-and-a-half slot open on Tuesday morning," she said. "I think I'll only need about five minutes," I replied. And that was how long it took me to explain that colourful, pretty and on-budget were musts, but that I didn't care what kind of flowers she used (ok, it was probably 15 minutes by the time I paid and filled out the paperwork). The florist told me she was surprised that a bride-to-be could make tough decisions quickly.

How decisive are you? Take our quiz to see where you stand ~ and to learn how you can be an even better decision-maker.

decision-making 101

"Some people find it hard to make a decision because they feel it's so important to get it right," says Peggy Grail, a speaker, executive coach and author of *Just Change It!: The Fast Track Guide to Personal & Professional Renewal* (Solutions Book Company).

"Lighten up on yourself and realize that few decisions in life are make or break." Grail recommends following these three steps when faced with a tough decision.

Picture your worst-case scenario Imagine that the place you choose for your vacation turns out to be a disaster. The room is a mess, the weather is bad and you get food poisoning.

"Acknowledge your fears," says Grail. "If you can live with them, then stop worrying."

Talk it over We're not talking about handing over the responsibility for making the decision to another person, but getting a fresh viewpoint can be a lifeline. "It can be helpful to get an outside perspective to weigh against what

you know and how you feel," says Grail. But she cautions that you need to consider the source: your family and friends have a vested interest in you and the outcome of your decisions. You might want to talk things over with a therapist or counsellor. "You can choose to see someone for one or two sessions," says Grail. "You get clarity when you unfold an issue in front of someone else."

Allow yourself a little Time Decisiveness is too often linked with speed, as if making snap decisions means you can really make up your mind. But giving yourself breathing room can let you gather information to make a better decision. If you're the procrastinating type, though, be sure to set a deadline!

Can't decide? Start here!

1 You're meeting a couple of friends for dinner. They ask if you've got a restaurant in mind, and you say:

- a. "Oh, I have no idea. Whatever you guys pick will be fine."
- b. "Sure, I can come up with a couple of places. Can I get back to you about it later?"
- c. "I was just reading some restaurant reviews, and here are a couple of places that sound good...."
- d. "Absolutely! I know the perfect place for us. I'll make a reservation now."

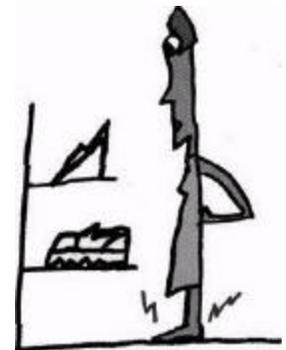
2 An important event is coming up, and you need an outfit that makes you stand out. You end up:

- a. spending a lot of time in stores but not finding anything. You try on every dress in your closet, too, but nothing seems perfect. You end up wearing a tried-and-true outfit that somebody complimented you on three years ago.
- b. putting it off until the day before the party, when you go on a rampage through the mall. You may end up choosing something that's more "will do" than "wow!"
- c. sussing out what you've already got in your closet, then shopping for an outfit that will be perfect for the event, fit your budget and be wearable in the future, too.
- d. immediately snapping up

your dream dress; it was love at first sight! You notice later that it doesn't go with your accessories and it requires extra-delicate dry cleaning.

3 When confronted with a big decision, you feel:

- a. anxious. You'd prefer that someone else make the choice.
- b. overwhelmed. There are so many important things to consider; you don't even know where to begin.
- c. determined. You're going to find the right solution, and you're willing to work to get as much information as you need.
- d. confident. You go with your instincts, and you feel you can trust them.>



4 A big holiday is coming up, and you and your partner are having trouble figuring out whose family you'll spend it with. The result is:

- a. you spend it with his, but you feel terrible about it because you feel you've let down your family. You visit them immediately after the big day to purge your guilt.
- b. you try to put off the decision as long as possible because you want to see how things shake-out. Maybe your parents will take that Caribbean cruise and you'll be off the hook after all!
- c. you discuss with your partner how you handled the issue last year. If the big holiday was spent with his folks, then it's only fair that this year will be spent with yours - or vice versa.
- d. you've already told your parents that you'll be at their place...without consulting your partner. A long fight is imminent.

5 You are trying to buy a computer but are flummoxed by all of the options. Still, you need to get one, so you:

- a. hold out as long as you can without one. When you finally give in and buy, it's a model that a salesperson assured you would be perfect for you.
- b. wait and wait, because you know that computer companies often come out with new models, and you don't want to miss out.
- c. research as much as you can about home computers. When you do go to buy one, you don't need a salesperson's help - you've got all the information you need.
- d. go out and get it. You know you need a computer, and you don't really care if it's a PC or a Mac. You need it now!

6 Your attitude about making decisions is:

- a. it's a hassle. You end up choosing the wrong thing, no one is ever happy, so why bother?



- b. it's important to get it right, but you never get enough time or information to properly consider all of the angles.
- c. there is a right choice for you every time, and you're confident you can find it.
- d. don't agonize about it. You make up your mind with minimal anxiety and deal with the fallout.

7 You were forced to pick a restaurant for the annual office party last year, and everyone hated the place. This year, your boss asks you to do it again, and your response is to:

- a. refuse no matter what she says. You felt as though people who hated the restaurant hated you, too, and you're never putting yourself in that spot again.
- b. remember what happened last year - you left the decision until the last minute. You feel that if you take this on, it will be déjà vu.
- c. poll everyone in your office about where to go and add that to your research. You're going to pick a perfect place this year.
- d. figure that, hey, people could not have hated the restaurant that much if the job fell into your lap again. And you have a perfect place in mind anyway.

Your decision-making profile

Mostly As

You are an ... *avoidance artist*

Nothing can compel you to take charge and make a decision entirely on your own. "This can be a self-esteem issue," says Grall. "The underlying emotion is fear." Your parents may have made decisions for you when you were growing up-or perhaps, as with many women, you put yourself last and worry about what everyone else wants.

Take action Practise making decisions. "Start with small things that don't have big consequences," says Grall. Read about the Method-Minded Mama and Decisive Diva (below) for inspiration. From the Mama you can learn how to research your options so you can back up your choices; from the Diva you can find out how to trust your own gut instincts.

Mostly Bs

You are a...*procrastinating perfectionist*

You have the ability to make decisions, but it takes you a long time to make up your mind. "Several factors play a role here: the wish to be right, the concern that you can't make good decisions, and a desire to avoid commitment," says psychologist Patricia Farrell, author of *How to Be Your Own Therapist: A Step By Step Guide to Taking Back Your Life* (McGraw-Hill). Procrastinators tend to be perfectionists, and that can be paralyzing.

Take action Make "Just do it" your new motto. You've got a lot in common with the Method-Minded Mama (below)-you both weigh your options and like to collect information-but you must break your holding pattern.

Mostly Cs

You are a ... *method-minded mama*

You weigh the pros and cons carefully before making decisions. You reflect on your choices and make balanced decisions. Your friends probably call on you when they need advice because of your measured approach.

Take action Don't miss out on opportunities that come up suddenly just because you don't have time to properly analyse them. Read about the Decisive Diva (below) for inspiration. And remember that there are things that are impossible to quantify. "Make sure you think about people, and not just facts, when you're coming to a decision," says Farrell. "Things won't always add up as you had calculated."

Mostly Ds

You are a...*decisive diva*

Your gut is your guide: you're willing to take chances on new ideas. "People like this tend to be less invested in the decision they're making," says Grail. "They are more about the big picture. They figure they can always take back something they buy or fix things later if they don't go right."

Take action Because you can be impulsive and rash, you can make decisions with consequences that aren't easy to reverse. Take a lesson from the Method-Minded Mama (above) and give yourself more time and information when making a big decision. "Learn when to shoot from the hip and when cool consideration is called for," says Farrell. •