

Are you ready to beat burnout and overwhelm?

Trust Yourself

A Simple 3-Step Decision-Making Approach to Power
Past Imposter Syndrome and Your Inner Perfectionist

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The Situation

Do you feel overwhelmed by the overabundance of choices in your life?

Does it feel like everywhere you turn, someone or something is demanding your time and attention?

Overwhelmed by all the opportunities you're bombarded with by the media and the device in your hand?

Has all this excess left you feeling exhausted, depleted, and burnt out?

Yeah, me too. And I felt that way for far too long.

And then, I came across a simple 3-step approach for achieving clarity and decisiveness based on time-tested philosophical tradition. It also inspires modern psychological approaches to achieving equanimity in any circumstance.

It's a simple process that's easy to weave into the life you're already living. With just a little practice, it becomes an instinctual response to the challenging and beguiling choices you come across every moment of every day.

Do you too often find yourself making impulsive decisions based on gut emotional reactions? Or overthinking situations and rationalizing rash decisions or settling into analysis paralysis? Practicing the approach taught here helps you avoid both.

Are you invested in endeavors that make things better, doing work that matters? Keep reading to learn a process for making better decisions that will help you experience better living while making a bigger difference.

Ready? Let's go.

"As soon as you trust yourself, you will know how to live."—Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

A Difference-Maker Is a Decision-Maker

To be a difference-maker is to work with and for the right people in endeavors that make things better.

What does it take to make a difference? Difference-makers must also be decision-makers.

You can't make a difference unless you take action. Stepping into possibility means seeking the edges of your understanding and abilities.

But how do you make the right decisions?

You can't. There are no right decisions, just alright decisions for right now.

Decisions are different from outcomes. You get to decide how you frame yourself and your situation and what you choose to do next. That's all. The results unfold as destiny wills.

Results are never guaranteed. You can't possibly know exactly how others will engage and interpret your actions (if they even notice). There's no guarantee that your decisions and next steps will have any impact on a situation, never mind the one you desire.

What to do? Control what is within your control.

What do you control? Everything you need. You have agency over how you frame yourself and your situation and what you choose and do next.

Decisions are different from outcomes, but some decisions are better than others. How do you tell bad decisions from good ones and better decisions from good ones?

Turns out there's a time-tested and scientifically vetted process that's easy to learn and weave into the life you're already living.

But before I can talk about that, I need to tell you about Marcus Aurelius.

Further reading - [What does it mean to be a difference-maker?](#) and [Are you doing the wrong thing \(or doing the thing wrong\)?](#)

Ancient Wisdom for Making Better Decisions

Marcus Aurelius was the last of what are known as the Five Good Emperors of the Roman Empire. During his reign, Marcus navigated famine, plague, natural disaster, and endless war. He approached all of these challenges with a remarkable level of equanimity, gratitude, and generosity.

How? By practicing three simple disciplines from Stoic philosophy.

Here's an example of how Marcus articulated the three disciplines.

*“Objective judgment, now, at this very moment.
Unselfish action, now, at this very moment.
Willing acceptance—now, at this very moment—of all external events.
That’s all you need.”*

Marcus’ quote lays out a pragmatic approach to decision-making still employed in modern psychological techniques like Positive Psychology and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy.

Here are the three Stoic disciplines Marcus is articulating in the quote above.

1. **“The Discipline of Perception”** cultivates objectivity and acknowledgment of your situation as it actually is so you can frame better choices.
2. **“The Discipline of Action”** encourages making rational decisions that align with your values and serve others.
3. **“The Discipline of Will”** promotes acceptance, joy in the journey, and an attitude of gratitude and growth.

These disciplines provide an easy-to-understand template for executing the art of better living by making better decisions. For the Stoics, this included cultivating equanimity in any circumstance.

Let’s employ a modern reframe of the three disciplines to lean into a challenge you’re currently experiencing with clarity, compassion, and character. Let’s make a bigger difference by making a better decision.

Further Reading - [3 Tips for Living the Good Life](#) and [Beyond Destiny](#)

Practicing the Disciplines

The three disciplines of Stoicism are reframed below as three questions with space to respond and help you practice. Although the questions are presented as three steps, understand that the process performs as a coherent whole.

To practice the three disciplines, bring to mind a decision you need to make about an obstacle or challenge. Although this process can help you navigate a tragedy or trauma, I don't recommend starting your practice with this type of event.

Choose a trial you can call to mind or speak out loud without too much agitation or anxiety. This will help you optimize the principles and practices. Don't overthink your answer. Write down responses that immediately leap to mind.

A few short reads to help you unpack the questions are included to help you go further. You're also invited to review [excerpts](#) from my handbook that inspired this process, *Onward: Where Certainty Ends, Possibility Begins*.

The Discipline of Perception – “What’s now?”

To navigate through a challenge, you must first **zoom out** to acknowledge and accept what is actually happening now. This helps you avoid acting upon unhealthy emotional reactions or unhelpful expectations.

Do the Work – “What’s now?”

What’s a challenge you are experiencing now?

Don’t choose something too raw or unprocessed. Professionals use this process to help clients work through trauma, but that’s not a place to start your practice. Choose something that doesn’t bring up too strong an emotional response. An everyday inconvenience or temporary hardship will do.

State what’s going on without value judgment or strong emotive language. This helps de-catastrophize the situation. It helps if you try to express your challenge in as few words as possible without adjectives or adverbs. Go for 6 – 10 words.

Further reading – [Feelings vs. Emotions](#) and [Choose Your Story, Choose Your Future](#)

“What’s now?” – Example

I’ve been a freelancer for over 30 years. The thing about freelancing is that you only make money when you have a gig.

Almost every day, I wake up and check my calendar to see how my gig pipeline looks. Sometimes I can tell that I don’t have enough gigs coming up to continue to take care of my financial obligations and responsibilities.

On those days, my internal narrative goes something like this.

“Holy sh*t! I don’t have enough gigs. No gigs, no money. Ahh! I won’t be able to pay all my bills at the end of the month. What happens if I can’t pay the mortgage? My kids will hate me. My wife will leave me. I’ll end up an alcoholic living in a box under an overpass and die alone and hungry!”

Seriously. I go there really quickly and quite often.

But when I zoom out and state what’s happening more objectively, I can identify and work the problem instead of letting it work me over.

Here’s a more objective reframe.

“I don’t have enough gigs on the calendar to pay my bills.”

The Discipline of Action – “What’s next?”

Zooming out staves off anxiety as you unpack your choices. Then you can **zoom in** to formulate a reasoned response. Decisions are not outcomes, yet they can influence them. Decide and act with intention and integrity.

Do the Work – “What’s next?”

What are your options for navigating the challenge you shared above? Write down as many possibilities as you can think of.

Which don’t align with who you really are or want to become? Cross those out.
Which serves your best interests and causes no harm to others? Circle those choices.

Now, which choice would most effectively and efficiently help you flourish without impeding anyone else’s ability to do the same? That’s your decision.

Further reading – [How to Decide](#) and [Help Yourself Help Others](#)

“What’s next?” – Example

Continuing the “I don’t have enough gigs to pay my bills” example, here’s what I might list as choices and how I might apply the process.

- I can reduce my expenses by canceling online subscriptions and other conveniences.
- ~~I can get a part-time job.~~
- ~~I can explore bankruptcy.~~
- I can raise my fees.
- I can connect with past clients for new business or referrals.
- I can sell the guitars I don’t play anymore.
- ~~I can give up and go back to teaching.~~

Reflecting on these choices, the step that feels like it would move me the fastest and furthest is connecting with past clients to see if they’d like to hire me again or would refer someone to me.

I might also incorporate some of the other choices.

The Discipline of Will – “What matters?”

The outcomes and results of your decisions are beyond your control. Yet, you possess everything you need to thrive. You control how you perceive yourself and your situation and what you decide to do next. Identity and meaning are forged and reflected through the quality of your day-to-day thoughts and actions.

Do the Work – “What matters?”

What really matters?

We often act unconsciously and with expediency. This serves neither our best interests nor aspirations nor those of others.

What does it mean to be truly human? What does it mean to be truly happy? How can you be more of both? Answering life’s big questions helps us define who we are and what aspirations are worthy of spending our valuable time, attention, and effort.

Further reading – [An End to Suffering](#) and [What does it mean to live your legacy?](#)

“What matters?” – Example

I first posed the three questions, “What does it mean to be human?” “What does it mean to be happy?” and “How can I be more of both?” in my book, [Endeavor: Cultivate Excellence While Making a Difference](#). Here’s how I answered.

“There are three things about what it means to be human with which I think you’ll agree. You are an inherently social creature. You are born with the capacity for reason. And you possess a creative impulse.

And by employing these instincts through meaningful endeavors, you can become more human and happy. You enhance your life most through endeavors that serve others.”

For me, defining and developing the difference only I can make and doing that work with and for people I care about is my life’s purpose. Making things better together is not a destination. **It’s a process.**

Leaning into this work with integrity and intention daily is its own reward. The outcomes and results take care of themselves.

Creative on Purpose isn’t the work I have to do. It’s the work I *get* to do.

Another quote by Marcus Aurelius that references the three disciplines comes to mind as I share these reflections.

“All you need are these: certainty of judgment in the present moment; action for the common good in the present moment; and an attitude of gratitude in the present moment for anything that comes your way.”

Takeaways

Engaging your agency and will over your perception and actions is essential for making better decisions that will help you make a bigger difference.

It also helps you develop excellence of character and cultivate the virtues of gratitude, generosity, humility, patience, and resilience.

This is how you build identity, forge meaning, and find fulfillment through life's ups and downs.

The quality of your thinking and effort, not recognition and results, are the real rewards in life. **Serve from the inside out.**



About the Author – Scott Perry

I'm a husband and father, go for a cemetery run every day, and quote Marcus Aurelius more often than I should.

As a Chief Difference-Maker at Creative on Purpose and a head coach in Seth Godin's Creative's and Freelancer's Akimbo Workshops, **I help people like you make a better living by making a bigger difference.**

My process for thriving while striving employs principles and practices that are time-tested, scientifically vetted, and cultivate greater equanimity and joy. Learn more at CreativeOnPurpose.com or contact me at scott@creativeonpurpose.com.

This guide is a distilled process unpacked more fully in [*Onward: Where Certainty Ends Possibility Begins*](#).

If you found the principles and practices shared here helpful, [let me know](#). Even better, teach them to someone else or share this document with them!