

MAKING

TOOLS TO HELP

GOOD

BALANCE HEAD AND HEART

DECISIONS

WRITTEN BY

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EBOOK EDITION 22.1

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“You write your life story by the choices you make. You never know if they have been a mistake. Those moments of decision are so difficult.”

Helen Mirren

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Disclaimer

While Careering is designed with women in mind, to share tools and insights to help women navigate the complexities of career and life in general, most of the content is relevant for all humans, and there is no intention to exclude any party.

There are gendered terms used throughout this ebook and other content from Careering, and these gender-specific terms may be used in order to ease the text flow.

- Whenever a gender-specific term is used, it should be understood as referring to both genders, and any party identifying as non-binary or any other marker, unless explicitly stated.
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If you have suggestions and ways to improve on this specific topic or in general, your feedback is very welcome. Please send to hey@careering9.com.

Introduction

Women belong in all places where decisions are being made.

It shouldn't be that women are the exception.”

Ruth Bader Ginsburg

If you've not seen the movie 'On the Basis of Sex', add it to the list, it's a powerful story and while times have changed a little, Ruth Bader Ginsburg faced many of the same dilemmas we do today when it comes to making choices around career, care-giving, having a family, and fighting for a cause. She's a force!

When it comes to making decisions, today women are being included more often but we're still a long way from it being equitable. We're also being overwhelmed with demands to make decisions, so here are some insights, tactics and tools to help you make those meaningful personal and professional decisions.

This is an extract from the upcoming book, and shares some known and some new models and ways of decision making. This ebook shares two models, there's a lot more but this is a good place to start. Enjoy!



Confer's
TED Talk

1

In a short TedX talk by Matthew Confer called “Three Steps to better decision-making”, he gives a slew of examples to support the three steps and an overview of each. These three are listed below, and the first two are worth unpacking a little more:

1. Challenge the constraints
2. Do a pre-mortem
3. Make sure the basics are right

He calls out how we often blatantly accept the constraints that we see initially, and then try to design solutions or make decisions with those constraints accepted as concrete, immovable, they just ‘are’. Almost as solid as ‘facts’.

Interestingly we’re often making decisions today, where the consequences are felt tomorrow or in a few hundred tomorrows. In a conversation with awesome human and super-brain Lee Parkinson at Black Betty in Christchurch, he said a phrase that I had to write down (and he sourced as being from the Institute of the Future) – he said that “the future has no facts”. Which is true yet oddly not a phrase or a view I’ve heard before.

We were talking in the context of setting strategy, mainly at a Board level, and how without ‘facts’ and certainty, people can start to feel uncomfortable and crave certainty more than ever before – how that has shown up in Lee’s experience and in mine, has been an over-commitment to how things were in the past, and any future thinking or creative solution design being constrained to slight adaptations of what’s occurred in the past. Yet with an open mind, a blank canvas, some sensibilities and a clear set of values and a vision, why don’t we assume we can then decide to set sail for that destination, and create the future we want?

If we’re aiming five or fifty years out, we can decide to head to a place that doesn’t yet exist, which means the ‘facts’ aren’t actually facts, and the constraints we’re operating with today might crumble under interrogation.

What about our own more personal ‘strategy’ or journey to that north star? The same applies. Our past capabilities can change, who we are at 21 is markedly different than who we are at 33, not just the obvious physical signs, or the emotional development, but our skills, knowledge, belief and determination can and typically are, different.

If we look back five years ago – consider a skill set you’ve developed in that time. Mine aren’t directly ‘career’ related but they’ve added to that area for sure. Firstly, I took up Zumba – that’s a crash course in being uncomfortable, not getting caught up in perfectionism and being able to have a laugh at yourself.

After a little more than a year, I still get it wrong, have to manage my mindset that it’s not ‘too hard’ and I’m useless and will never get it when there’s distractions around me, I can’t get the moves or I’m tired, but hell, I love how much I laugh, and how much it feels like you’re totally free to just move. If you’re a music lover, and love to dance, get into it!

I also got myself a mountain bike and have slowly dipped my toes in there too. With a good long list of injuries to my credit, I’ve no aspirations to send it on a big level, but I love the feeling of speed, forest air and leg power! A few lessons and lots of asking questions of my very skilled mountain biking friends, I understand how berms work and what a dropper post is and can head out for an hour or so and stay upright.

Okay, this isn’t a plug for Zumba or mountain biking, but a reminder that in a year I’ve added skills to my skill set that just didn’t exist for me a few years ago. Because I chose to, I chose the discomfort and the learnings, and they’re paying off. No quick wins or “beginner to ballsy biker overnight” tales here (there’re out there too though!), just that sometimes a slow and steady growth journey is good one to keep in mind.

What this has to do with Confer though is connected to his advice about constraints. He wants us to challenge them.

Our view of our own capabilities can be a massive constraint. What we ‘used’ to do has little bearing on what we ‘can’ do if we want to - yet often we’re quick to say “I can’t do that” – let’s add in a loud YET to the end of that.

He also suggests that what we see as a constraint, might not be as solid as we think. Sometimes it’s about assessing it and challenging ourselves to come up with ways to manage them, or remove them. The old saying ‘constraint breeds creativity’ comes to mind. I know with Covid and the changing restrictions we’re now existing with, many people have had to dramatically adjust plans, life, businesses and while there are sadly stories where things have hit hard, there are also stories of people finding a spark of genius in how they adjust their lives. So get creative – decide which of these constraints are real and solid, which can be edited or erased, and which ones you will craft a savvy workaround for. Just please don’t blindly accept them.

Then it’s onto the pre-mortem. You know you’re onto a winner when research on something leads to both HBR and McKinsey. I’m joking – I have a love/hate view of both of these as info sources, while I value the research and evidence base alongside the practical examples in HBR, and the scale and experience of McKinsey, both are hugely capitalised intuitions with a lot of their content deeply embedded in the capital markets in the US so there’s always a lens of ‘what’s missing?’ and ‘what does that actually mean for me/us/this context’ when I read their content. Long disclaimer over.

Back to pre-mortems though, which I first heard about from Confer. He says:

“It’s human nature to strategize an approach to a decision and then spend time formulating and strategizing all the ways you will be successful. However, many times we fail to spend any time considering the many ways the decision we are considering could end in failure.

Investing the time upfront to brainstorm how a path under consideration could fail is a valuable exercise for you to adjust your decision-making to mitigate for those outcomes.”



Basically, figure out where the trip hazards are early, consider what you'd do to overcome them or if they're deadly (dramatic pause). Factoring these in while deciding means you've got a more well-rounded and balanced perspective.

Okay, it's about to get a little more grim as we move to why it's called a premortem.

“A premortem is the hypothetical opposite of a post-mortem. A post-mortem in a medical setting allows health professionals and the family to learn what caused a patient’s death. Everyone benefits except, of course, the patient. A premortem in a business setting comes at the beginning of a project rather than the end, so that the project can be improved rather than autopsied. Unlike a typical critiquing session, in which project team members are asked what might go wrong, the premortem operates on the assumption that the “patient” has died, and so asks what did go wrong. The team members’ task is to generate plausible reasons for the project’s failure.”

Gary Klein – HBR

McKinsey talk to the same concept and detail the exact same example that Gary does, but they also share why project teams often don't focus on the possible potholes. They talk to studies that show that project leaders tend to be overconfident, their plans are reasonable and logical so there appears to be little cause for worry. The McKinsey article also reminds us that at the start of a project or when a new team is formed there's usually great harmony at the start so being the one to raise worries can be challenging.

“Research also shows that most individuals are afraid to speak out against the group and explicitly identify problems with a plan” – McKinsey

So you've got a great team together, but no-one wants to be the one to ask the hard questions and highlight where it could all fall apart? Be that person if you can, better still, lead or ask for a pre-mortem session so everyone's 'hindsight' can be harnessed – it will lead to better decision making and way better outcomes.

How To 2



How to Conduct a Pre-Mortem

Here's the short version of how to conduct a pre-mortem:

1. Get the crew together, team lead then informs everyone that the project has failed
2. Individually, write down all the possible reasons why it's failed
3. Collect and write up each different reason so you've got the full range
4. Discuss and mitigate
5. Adjust plans/actions to suit



If you want a more detailed way to run a pre-mortem, search Atlassian – they’ve detailed how to go about it using Trello and other digital tools, really nice for remote teams. A little too intense for some scenarios though.

This concept is useful for the big team projects, but also for your own decisions. You can run this with people you trust when you’re weighing up doing your Masters, hiking across Spain, doing the next round of IVF or moving into agribusiness – whatever the decision, having a lens on what can go wrong can be useful.

Disclaimer – this is one step, not THE main step and it’s designed to help see possible causes of failure not be a crippling or depressing exercise where it all starts to feel hopeless. If that’s how you’re feeling, flip it and put the ‘yellow hat’ on (if you’re not familiar with De Bono’s Six Thinking Hats, [there’s a summary here](#)), and run it again with the upsides noted. Balance!





Fear
Setting

3

If you are evaluating individual options, Tim Ferris' favoured monthly exercise of "Fear Setting" might be better for you. It's along the same lines as a pre-mortem but you tackle it a little differently.

Ferris has a practise that sits alongside his goal setting, where after defining his goals he then details the outcomes that would be his worst nightmare. Next he adds in all the other worst case options and gives them a score.

Taking this approach, you can then see your goal, which if it's on your wish list, likely has a 8,9 or 10/10 score on the feelgood scale, comparative to 'the nightmare' – which might be a 9 too, or it might be a 5. You can then work out what you would do if it happened and make steps to reduce the risk, or go for it knowing what you'll do if it does happen.

Tim gives his example of doing this exercise where he'd been letting his fear hold him back from enacting his goal.

"I was risking an unlikely and temporary 3 or 4 for a probable and permanent 9 or 10, and I could easily recover my baseline workaholic prison with a bit of extra work if I wanted to."

He's also got three free worksheets available on his site to help you complete this exercise too.

It's a really nice way of developing a game plan that you've crafted with your eyes open, you know what you're up for, how to tackle some of the challenges, and give yourself the best chance of that awesome 10/10 you bloody deserve!



*“Never trust your fears,
they don’t know your strength.”*

Anonymous



Official Stuff

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Sources and References

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THANK YOU

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