

5 choices you will regret forever

By [Travis Bradberry](#) May 8, 2017

Our days are filled with a constant stream of decisions. Most are mundane, but some are so important that they can haunt you for the rest of your life.

A recent study from Columbia University found that we're bogged down by more than 70 decisions a day. The sheer number of decisions we have to make each day leads to a phenomenon called decision fatigue, whereby your brain actually tires like a muscle.

A recent study from the University of Texas shows that even when our brains aren't tired, they can make it very difficult for us to make good decisions. When making a decision, instead of referencing the knowledge we've accumulated, our brains focus on specific, detailed memories.

For example, if you're buying a new car and trying to decide if you should go for the leather seats, even though you know you can't afford it, your brain might focus on memories of the wonderful smell and feel of the leather seats in your brother's sports car, when it should be focused on the misery you're going to experience when making your monthly car payments. Since you don't have memories of this yet, it's a hard thing for your brain to contemplate.

“I am not a product of my circumstances. I am a product of my decisions.” –Stephen Covey

Some decisions are minor, such as what to eat, which route to drive to work, or in what order to tackle tasks. Others are more difficult, such as choosing between two job offers, whether to move to a new city for someone you love, or whether to cut a toxic person out of your life.

Regardless of the magnitude of the decision, our brains make it hard for us to keep the perspective we need to make good choices.

Bronnie Ware spent her career as a palliative care nurse, working exclusively with people who were 3 to 12 months from death. She made a habit of asking them about their greatest regrets, and she heard the same five regrets time and time again. By studying these regrets, you can make certain that you make good choices and don't fall victim to them yourself.

1. They wish they hadn't made decisions based on what other people think

When you make your decisions based on other people's opinions, two things tend to happen.

You make a poor career choice. There are too many people out there who studied for a degree they regret or even spent their lives pursuing a career they regret. Whether you're seeking parental approval or pursuing pay and prestige over passion, making a poor career choice is a decision that will live with you forever.

You fail to uphold your morals. When you get too caught up in what your boss thinks of you, how much money you think your spouse needs to be happy, or how bad you will look if you fail, you are at high risk of violating your own morals. Your intense desire to make yourself *look good* compromises your ability to stay true to yourself and, ultimately, to *feel good*.

The best way to avoid falling prey to the opinions of others is to realize that other people's opinions are just that — opinions. Regardless of how great or terrible they think you are, that's only their opinion. Your true self-worth comes from within.

2. They wish they hadn't worked so hard

Working hard is a great way to impact the world, to learn, to grow, to feel accomplished, and sometimes even to find happiness, but it becomes a problem when you do so at the expense of the people closest to you. Ironically, we often work hard to make money for the people we care about without realizing that they value our company more than money.

The key is to find a balance between doing what you love and being with the people you love. Otherwise you'll look back one day and wish you'd focused more on the latter.

3. They wish they had expressed their feelings

We're taught as children that emotions are dangerous and that they must be bottled up and controlled. This usually works at first, but boxing up your feelings causes them to grow until they erupt. The best thing you can do is to put your feelings directly on the table. Though it's painful to initiate, it forces you to be honest and transparent.

For example, if you feel as though you don't make enough money at work, schedule a meeting with your boss and propose why you think you're worth more. As a result, she will either agree with you and give you a raise or disagree and tell you what you do need to do to become more valuable. On the other hand, if you do nothing and let your feelings fester, this will hinder your performance and prevent you from reaching your goal.

4. They wish they had stayed in touch with their friends

When you get caught up in your weekly routine, it's easy to lose sight of how important people are to you, especially those you have to make time for. Relationships with old friends are

among the first things to fall off the table when we're busy. This is unfortunate because spending time with friends is a major stress buster. Close friends bring you energy, fresh perspectives, and a sense of belonging, in a way that no one else can.

5. They wish they had let themselves be happy

When your life is about to end, all the difficulties you've faced suddenly become trivial compared to the good times. This is because you realize that, more often than not, suffering is a choice. Unfortunately, most people realize this far too late.

Although we all inevitably experience pain, how we react to our pain is completely under our control, as is our ability to experience joy. Learning to laugh, smile, and be happy (especially when stressed) is a challenge at times, but it's one that's worth every ounce of effort.

Bringing it all together

Some decisions have repercussions that can last a lifetime. Most of these decisions are made daily, and they require focus and perspective to keep them from haunting you.

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