

Deciding to Choose

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The last of the human freedoms is to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances.

Victor E. Frankl

Special points of interest:

- **The choices we make ultimately determine how we experience our lives ...**
- **Choice is about responsibility, ownership, trust and acceptance of our decisions ...**
- **If we limit ourselves to what we think is possible we may find ourselves in compromise**
- **When making choices we need to identify what it is we really want**
- **Think about the result you want then choose your words wisely**
- **The coaching process enables clients to look at the choices they are making and to explore other possibilities and options**

Making choices is a tricky business. The choices we make ultimately determine how we experience our lives and whether or not we expand, remain static or contract. Often in choosing we hand over our power to other people, circumstances, or internal belief systems which have become habitual and unquestioned. Sometimes we are not aware that we have a choice, sometimes we are in denial about choice because it feels safer and easier to stay where we are, so recognising that we make choices continually with or without awareness is a crucial insight.

Choice is about responsibility, ownership, trust and acceptance of our decisions which is why it can feel easier to relinquish choosing by turning a blind eye or convincing ourselves that we have no choice. Instead of choosing to create what we want we often make choices based on what we want to avoid, that is to say what we don't want. If we continually make choices to avoid what we don't want we inevitably stand still or even shrink and life often feels disappointing, lack lustre and stuck. This in turn creates inner dissatisfaction and struggle not to mention insecurity, envy and a sense that other people who do get what they want somehow have it easier.

But that's not how it has to be. People can make choices in the most desperate of circumstances where room to manoeuvre seems almost non-existent. I remember hearing Peter Cundall, the ABC's Gardening Expert, during an interview describe being a Japanese Prisoner of War. He was in solitary confinement for many months and deprived of the basics of human existence. He made a decision to cope with it through his love of classical music by playing every one of his favourite overtures, symphonies, concertos and choral works in his mind - every bar, every movement every chorus. This decision allowed him to re-frame his response to his circumstances in a scenario which most of us might view as hopeless. This was a conscious choice.

If we limit ourselves to what we think is possible we may find ourselves in compromise, and whilst this is inevitable in certain circumstances, when making choices we need to identify what it is we really want and learn how we are keeping ourselves in a place of limitation. How do we do this? Well in the coaching process I pay attention to peoples' language and reflect back what I hear. For example, a common way in which people relinquish responsibility is with the phrase "I can't help it", or "it's just the way I am" or "if only ...".

Recognising we have patterns is one thing, assigning ourselves to a life sentence with these patterns unquestioned, unexamined, unchanged and unchallenged is quite another. It's a common and often over-looked powerful opportunity to begin the process of creating a new perspective. Our language can keep us safe and offer us appealing refuge when we want to believe our story.

How often have you heard the phrase "You don't mind do you?". Roughly translated, this means "I don't want you to tell me that you mind because I don't want to take responsibility for the hurt I may have caused." This language is about relinquishing responsibility - perhaps for all the right reasons, but nevertheless a choice to use language to keep a habitual pattern. Notice your vocabulary, how often do you use the word "you" when you mean "I"? How often do you use the words "should", "must", "ought", all punishing words which usually serve to cause frustration, shame, and stress? Why not replace these words with "I would like", "I choose", "I am working towards" or simply "I want".

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www.thecatalystgroup.com.au



©The Catalyst Group

461 Scarborough Beach Road
Osborne Park WA 6017

Phone: (08) 9492 8909

Fax: (08) 9446 8089

E-mail: info@thecatalystgroup.com.au

Deciding to Choose ... *Continued*

The Catalyst Leadership Development Program asks the question "what is the language of a good leader?" What type of language sends messages of inclusion, cooperation and integration? How can I value someone by intentionally selecting my words? If Leaders want to develop their people, attention to the detail of their vocabulary and communication style can have a huge impact on the way they are perceived and the results they create. Attention to the detail of words and conscious use of encouraging, congruent and affirming language can have a huge impact on results. Think about the result you want and then choose your words wisely.

Choice is nature's way of not letting us off the hook. If we deny choice, choose without awareness, or choose to keep the status quo by simply refusing to choose to avoid the discomfort of growth, we are still choosing. The Catalyst Group uses the coaching process to enable clients to look at the choices they are making and to explore other possibilities and options. Setting goals, having a vision and aspiring to something different creates the 'tension' whose job is simply to resolve itself by taking us through the process of change, growth and expansion. We can't time our insights but we can choose to step into the circumstances which might instigate them.

To choose is to stake a claim on personal power and to make things happen rather than spectate whilst they do. Our choices create our life, whether we know it or not.

Judith Taylor, Senior Consultant