

CHAPTER 3

DECISION

Dad always talked a lot about decision. In fact, he talked about procrastination, which he described as the common enemy of decision. When we procrastinate, we do not make decisions – we delay. Napoleon Hill also talked about this, and observed that any human being that has achieved anything in their lives has always had the ability to make decisions. When you analyse the many men and women who have experienced failure, lack of decision was nearly always one of the list of major causes of that failure.

You can test this by thinking about, and looking into, how quickly we make decisions and what impact this has. Hill said that an analysis of many thousands of people who have been successful way beyond their initial imaginations, shows they have a habit of making decisions promptly and changing decisions slowly when it becomes necessary. People who fail to successfully achieve their goals have the habit of reaching decisions very slowly, if at all, and then changing decisions

very quickly. As soon as something goes wrong, bang, they just scurry to their old habits.

So, it is an important concept. If we look back at history, there are many leaders that we can point to who were renowned for successfully navigating decision-making.

One thing that Covid-19 has taught me, with all its challenge and uncertainty, is that you need to stop to make a decision, even though the world does not stop moving. You have got to take time to stop, unload the baggage, and then give some serious thought to making decisions.

I believe that I have made some fantastic decisions during the course of lockdown – for myself, for the business and for the organisation. Now, I look back and ask how I was able to do that, and I think that stopping for a moment allowed me to make decisions with a clear mind. Dad used to say, when you stop and look at yourself, reflect upon the result rather than the problem; it is like turning on a light in a dark room.

Most people who fail to succeed experience problems because they are too heavily influenced by other people's opinions. They permit newspapers, gossips or neighbours to be their thinking. 'Opinions are the cheapest commodities on earth,' Dad always said, echoing Hill's words. Do listen to people, do respect people, and when they are telling you something, appreciate that they are effectively giving you their opinion. That is okay – there are many people who truly have your best interests at heart – but it is their opinion. And Hill wrote that everyone has a flock of opinions ready to be thrust upon anyone who

will accept them. If you are influenced by the opinions of others, when you reach decisions you will not succeed, much less translate your own desire into success.

If we allow the opinions of others to influence too much, we lose focus on our own desire, passion and purpose to achieve – the elements key to success that we noted about Desire in Chapter 1. It is important to have good advisers and mentors: For me, Bob, Clay and my father have all been great mentors. In fact, I started to take on board a lot more insight from my dad after he had departed, so mentors do not necessarily have to be there in front of you. We can recollect and process information they have told us that perhaps we did not appreciate at the time.

‘When you are making decisions, you have got to be on a moral compass and make sure you are working within your values and your purpose. If you are,’ Dad always said, ‘go ahead and make a decision.’

When it came to our education business, which we started together, any time we had to make a difficult decision Dad said, ‘There is so much information around you but you cannot know the future.’ By the same principle, during the Covid-19 lockdown, Regent has launched its EdTech business – Regent Digital.

In decisions, the most important thing to remember is that you cannot make a decision based on what has happened, because what has happened is history. Looking at the results of what has happened before and then making a decision is not necessarily the right approach.

Dad said it is simple; first ask the question, get your mind ready,

and then go back to your purpose. Our purpose was quite simple; the end result of education is character. So, when you are in the space and you are looking at a particular decision that you need to make, you really need to ask the question: Is it good, proper, lawful and moral for your students? If it is the right thing to do, just go ahead and do it.

Students are everything to us. Education is a noble profession and students come to us, trusting us to enhance their knowledge – we are their custodians. Dad said, ‘Do not worry about who is in front of you, just accept that they may have a different opinion to yours. That is not the point, you have got to make a committed decision and get to work.’ That stayed with me and I use that regularly.

You cannot make decisions based on what has happened just as you cannot make decisions based on current results, because if you work with the current results, that only reflects your previous thinking from the past. If you just want to tinker and improve, it does not work; you will get the same results over and over again. What you really need to do is say that was okay, that is the past, I’m not going to think about that and I am not going to base my future positions on that. You can learn from the past and learn from mistakes to inform your future position, that is the beautiful thing.

But what we are really talking about is looking at what you want to achieve – the starting point, the idea. From there, you evolve that idea, build from there and enjoy that experience. Your feelings will change and as your feelings change, then you will get into action. We know from research that when these feelings move into the subconscious

mind, it is impossible to stop them. This approach produces results and then you look into the results and ask whether you like the results. If you do not, then you say that your previous thoughts and actions got you to here but move forward and figure out your next goal.

Dad always said that your close friends and relatives – while not meaning to – often hold you back when they offer their opinions. Sometimes because of those views, which are meant to be humorous, thousands of men and women carry an inferiority complex. I know I used to. All through my life, well-meaning, but ignorant people have destroyed my confidence through opinions. Since I was a child, I was constantly given advice to look after my body weight. It still bothers me, and I am still working on it; it is easy to see where I need to get to, but extremely hard to practise.

We have a brain and a mind of our own, so let us use it and reach our own decisions. Hill said that if we seek facts or information from other people to enable us to reach decisions, we should go and acquire those facts and secure the information, without necessarily amplifying what we are doing. You have got to talk to people, talk to your close teams, talk to your trusted advisers and seek out people who will genuinely provide another point of view. It is normal for people to gather input and do research, but those that tend not to be successful often talk too much and take remarkably little action.

Keep your eyes and ears open. Dad used to say, in a very crude way, ‘You have two ears, two eyes, and only one mouth. Think in mathematical terms and use them in a proportionate manner.’ He was working with various people – our family comes from farms in

Sri Lanka, and we were associated with various property projects, so Dad was dealing with people at a senior level; CEOs of companies, while also working with people from the bottom up – the labourers and others on the building sites. The only way he was able to relate to them was to give these examples. Are you using your mouth, ears and eyes proportionately, or are you using your mouth more?

Those who talk too much deprive themselves of opportunities, as well as unnecessarily talking about things within themselves that they may be imagining. It is important that our imagination gets more weight, power and knowledge before it goes out. In reality, it is incredibly important to have an incubation period.

Remember also that every time you open your mouth in the presence of a person who has an abundance of knowledge, you display to that person your exact stock of knowledge, or lack of it. This is something that Hill highlighted. He said that genuine wisdom is usually demonstrated through modesty, silence and calmness. Keep in mind the fact that every person with whom you associate is like yourself. Treat people in the sense that they are, like you, seeking the opportunity to be successful. Help them. If you talk about your plans, if it comes from your heart, if it is going to help the other person, do help them, and then get into action.

Dad said you should keep a closed mouth and open ears and eyes and use your intellectual factors to achieve more of your goals, desires and dreams.

Throughout this book and throughout my life with Dad, one key theme is that we become what we think about. Bob Proctor puts that

very eloquently in his own work and Dad said that many times. It should be backed up by our desire, which has a tendency to transmute itself into reality. The thought makes this astonishing transformation, and then the thought drives our decision.

Dad said that we should not look for miracles, as there is no such thing, just the laws of nature, which can be extraordinarily powerful. They may be used to bring freedom to nations – think about Mahatma Gandhi, one man who literally challenged the whole British Empire and achieved India’s freedom. Bringing freedom to a nation comes from your imagination, your ability, your faith, your courage and your desire, all of which are needed to become successful. If you look at Nelson Mandela it is exactly the same story, and if you look at every great man or woman who has made history.

These individuals do not have a particular degree from Stanford or Harvard, Oxford or Cambridge. There are so many people who have got those degrees who are hardly known in history. And there are so many people who are known and have not got those. I am not saying those degrees are not valuable, absolutely they are, and I would encourage everybody to go and study at good universities because that is where our passion lies, we are in education.

But what I am saying is not to confuse the matter – just getting a good academic qualification does not mean you are going to make good decisions. We learn decision-making in various financial programmes and MBAs, but all we are learning are mathematical models. Then we talk about the qualitative factors of decision-making, which again are theoretical. True decision-making is very much an

internal mechanism. This is where our idea of education heavily promotes inside-out education. The understanding of how our DNA, our environment and our mind can formulate a dynamic learning culture also fits nicely with the idea of lifelong learning.

Being decisive is something you learn when you are young and develop as you mature. We build a definitive purpose; if we do not have purpose, how can we make decisions? If people cannot tell you straight away what their purpose is, you know they have not thought about it and they are not working through it. How do they then make decisions?

One weakness of many of the world's educational systems is that they overlook the importance of decision-making. They talk about models, they talk about various ways of doing it, but our alternative inside-out education spends a lot of time on knowing and doing. It comes to the fundamentals of doing.

If you have a section in your degree or MBA about decision-making, and indeed when I did my Chartered Accountancy qualification there was a section on decision-making, you cover complex financial models, net present values and IRRs. That is all valuable, but here we are talking about the ability to make sensible, definite decisions.

It would be much better if colleges did not let students enrol until they were clear on their reasons for wanting to enrol. Why do you want to do it? Even better, every student should start out with the habit of making decisions.

The habit of indecision comes from a deficiency in the early

schooling system, and also from so-called career advisers at school. The people giving that advice have often never been in those careers at all. Therefore, all they are sharing is their opinion. Individuals need to make their own decisions based on the right information.

Decisiveness requires courage, and sometimes a lot of courage. Saying you are going to change things fundamentally and taking on the status quo can be terrifying. But people do make that decision. As long as it's lawful and purpose, values and morals are there, then go and do it – do not worry about the outcome, just get on and do it.

As I deal with decision, it is also important to think about the planning aspect, which we will revisit further in subsequent chapters. Dad said that the greatest joy of a human being is the joy of accomplishment, and accomplishments come from making committed decisions.

Do you know how great this joy becomes when you are making constant decisions, growing your mind, your talent and your abilities? It's a process, like learning music – if you want to become good at it, you must practise over and over again. If you look at sports personalities, they do things over and over again.

Dad used to say we should think of life as the perfect ground to be seeded. It can only return to you if you first give to it by making definitive decisions. What do you give in the way that you think? This is where decision is related to the human psychology, the greatest single agency ever to appear on earth. Dad said, 'You have far more abilities than you have ever used, and you have got a reservoir of talent, but you have got to develop it, you have far more talent than you can probably imagine.'

You also have time – the one thing that is completely beyond the control of all of us. Time, which cannot be saved, stopped or held back for even an instant. You don't manage time; you only manage activities. So, when you are making decisions, you really need to understand the concepts and develop your intellectual faculties, but the most important thing to use in making those decisions is your intuition.

You are making decisions based on what is going to happen in the future, and you do not know exactly what the future is going to be. While I am writing this book, the whole world is going through the Covid-19 global health crisis. Even just weeks previously, we did not know the world would come to a standstill. How do you make decisions if you are running an organisation and making investments when faced with these kinds of eventualities? You have got to believe and make decisions with conviction and purpose, then you will be able to make things happen.

Dad said we should make use of these riches while you have them. Why wait? There is no second chance. Make a decision now if you want to do something. Use truth as your guide and your achievements will return in abundance if you make sensible, committed decisions. There will always be bad days when you feel things are not working – that's part of life, he said. And he said you should not worry until the worry worries you. If things appear to go wrong, continue to work and just enjoy it. Take the fun, do your work and the skies will clear.

Making decisions and taking action are an important part of life. To bring us to a conclusion, consider that making decisions is very much

linked to intuition. Intuition comes as a human intellectual factor and is given to us when we are born. But it needs to be developed and you can only develop intuition by understanding who you are and how and why you are doing things. If you just make decisions with your sensory factors, the current thinking is that – and I am not necessarily saying this is completely right or wrong – you are making decisions simply in the way that animals make them. What we are really talking about here is making decisions about the future, making decisions about what the world is going to look like.

It is so important to develop our mental faculties – our perception, our point of view, our will and our ability to think about something and then make a decision. Imagination is crucial because if you do not have the imagination, how do you then construct a decision? And also reason – ultimately this all fits into your intuition. Intuition is so, so critical and we can develop it for ourselves. There are ways and means of developing intuition, but it will not develop itself.

As Steve Jobs once said, ‘Have the courage to follow your heart.’ Make your decisions based on intuition. He always said you can never connect the dots looking forward, but you can always connect the dots looking backwards. But your dots will definitely connect in the future if you have a desire and a purpose and you are making committed decisions. Then suddenly the laws of nature will get you to where you want to get to.

This is an incredibly useful lesson and you will find a lot of information available to help you develop your own skills in making definite, purposeful decisions. Every time you face a decision, you need to return to the idea of your over-arching purpose.