

Decisions and Opportunities

Live with intention.
Walk to the edge.
Listen hard.
Practice wellness.
Play with abandon.
Laugh.
Choose with no regret.
Continue to learn.
Appreciate your friends.
Do what you love.
Live as if this is all there is.

- Mary Anne Radmacher

Choix, izbor, volby, valg, wahl, scelta... choice. In my opinion, the most important word in any language. Choice! Anybody that knows me has likely heard me spout out my “life is about decisions and opportunities” speech... and possibly on more than one occasion. You could call it an understanding or a theory... or maybe even a perspective. But it’s something that has driven my thinking for many years now. It is crucial to my life and to what I am about to share today. For that reason I believe it’s best to start by detailing my perspective on **Decisions and Opportunities!**

Why are some people happy; While others are sad? Why do some people have abundant luxury... while others have nothing? Why is it that the sad people may be the ones with abundant luxury, while the happy ones are those with nothing?

It is my belief that when we really boil life down and look at it’s core, it comes down to decisions and opportunities. We do not have any control or ability to manage the opportunities that come to us in life. We have absolute control over all of the decisions in our life. The two are very much related.

Each day, we make hundreds, if not thousands of choices. What time to wake up. What to wear to work. What to eat for breakfast. It is my perspective that there are many levels of decisions we have to make each day. From simple decisions like “what radio station do I listen to in the car”. To life altering decisions like, “where should I work or live”. To core “soul” decisions like what do I want to accomplish in life or what is ethically right or wrong. No decision, regardless of level is more or less important. If there’s anything I’ve learned in life... it’s that those simple, small, daily decisions that are driven by the larger decisions we have made... and those larger decisions would never be possible without the small ones.

For example, a decision to prioritize health and fitness in life (a “soul” decision) wouldn’t be accomplished or possible without the small daily choices to eat right, exercise and to choose health over... well over whatever is the opposite of health.

Opportunities are the times in life where we are confronted with an option, or several options and are given the privilege to make a choice! We cannot create our own opportunities... but we are able to make choices that will allow for opportunity. If we were all able to magically create our own opportunities, the challenge and sheer power of choice would be gone. This doesn’t mean that we do not have any power over opportunities. We do. We have the ability to provide others with opportunities... with our own choices!

For example, if I make a personal choice to be a millionaire this does not make me a millionaire immediately... but if I have truly made this choice, it will then begin to drive and dictate my small, daily choices. I will then begin to act and choose to meet the right people, or learn new information. This in turn will result in opportunities being created... the people I meet offer me a job or a connection that helps me proceed further and further down the path of being a millionaire.

This, in my opinion, is one of the most beautiful things of life. No one person can accomplish much without their own positive choices... and the positive choices of others around them. Even the most powerful, “self made” millionaires would have to admit that they would have NOTHING if it weren’t also for the choices of others (their customers or staff or families).

Further to understanding that life is simply about decisions, which we control... and opportunities that we look for or create for others... is the understanding that WE are the only people that can make decisions for ourselves. Nobody else can make our decisions for us... and we cannot make decisions for others. Listen to that carefully... NOBODY else can make our decisions. We cannot make decisions for others.

Many people dislike my perspective because it removes the ability to disown responsibility for our own lives. If we aren’t the one in control of our own decisions, we cannot be held accountable for our current life situations. Many people find solace in that.

I’ve worked for a fair while with people that are “down on their luck” or “on the street”. People that deal with drug addiction, homelessness, abuse, prostitution and much more. I cannot say that all of those people are there by choice... but many of them are. Not because they literally say “I wish to sell my body today”. These folks actually don’t even realize that they are making this decision. They believe that this is just the situation that they are in and they have no choice.

I have two friends. One was raped and abused at a young age. He has let that hurt and pain drive his daily actions. He has chosen to be angry and abusive and lets alcohol take over his days. His sister... also raped and abused has chosen to take that pain and use it to fuel her passion for helping others that are going through that same situation and to raise a family with kindness and love. Being raped was an opportunity; an opportunity to choose to be angry... or to be passionate about helping others.

One of the biggest struggles that EVERYONE fights is acknowledging and taking ownership of the decisions in their life. So often we will allow a situation to dictate what our choices are... or not realize that we are making decisions (no decisions – is still a decision). People are strange. Some crave control and demand the power to make decisions for others. While some people look for any opportunity to avoid making a choice and want for others to take that responsibility.

Every one of the people I respect the most... Bono, Richard Branson, Bill Clinton, Bill Gates, Ghandi, Mother Theresa... did not accomplish what they have by having the perfect opportunities fall into their paths. They made consistent and continual positive choices... which created more opportunities, that lead to more positive decisions... that lead to more opportunities... you see where I'm going.

Yes Bill Gates grew up in a wealthy home with many opportunities that most of us will never have... but he could have chose to be a university drop out that lived in his parents basement until he was 50 and worked at McDonalds (he's a techie... that is a very realistic possibility). Instead he chose to be a university drop out that revolutionized the world we all live in. He had to make HARD and consistent choices to accomplish what he did. Were all of his decisions the right ones? Not likely. But he would not be where he is today without acknowledging and making decisions. The people I respect the most are those that did not let their situation dictate their life and choices... instead that acknowledged that their choices were their own and began making positive decisions.

In spending time with "my friends on the street", one of the hardest things for me to come to terms with was the fact that we cannot make other people's decisions for them. All we are able to do is to make our own personal choices to provide opportunity after opportunity after opportunity. Until somebody is ready to acknowledge that their life situation is based on their own choices... and are ready to be accountable and make positive decisions... that's all you can do. It's frustrating and very hard. But that's where love comes in. If you truly love somebody, unconditionally (not romantically... but as a person)... you will continue to provide opportunity.

I believe in God. I believe that he created me and you and this earth around us. Right now I don't know where I stand on Christianity and Jesus... but God, I'm very sure of. I wont today get into the specifics of my faith and God's "systems" and how I think that this worlds works. I will say that I believe in a God that is

involved and relational. If I were to chat with God today about what I was accomplishing in my life, I know that God wouldn't ask me about my bank balance or my charitable involvement. I think that God would ask me about my choices... and my choices to create opportunities for others.

Not everybody is provided with the same resources or situations in life. We are not all provided with the same opportunities. But we are all provided with the ability to choose... over and over. It's what makes us equal. Everyone, regardless of life situation, race or gender... has the ability to choose, every single day.

I believe that in life, we are accountable for our lives; To use our skills and our abilities in the best way possible to impact the world around us. We do this by making choices.

I could very easily write a book on my perspective of Decisions and Opportunities; but that is not what I am attempting to do today. I have laid out this perspective so that you can understand my heart and mind as I outline my life path for the last while... and look to you to help me stay true to the choices I know to be right into the future.

A long while ago...

I graduate Laurier University in 2002. In my fourth and last year of school I was recruited by 3 very large corporations; all offering future potential, sizable salaries and hours of work in offices in downtown Toronto. From the first day that I met with those recruiters, I knew that the corporate world was not for me.

All my life I've been a performer for other people. In High school I wasn't at the very top of my class, but I was always a contender and could always be found on the top 10 lists for awards or academics. I worked hard because I knew that it felt right and that it would please the people around me. Throughout university, it was the same. I was never top of the class, but I consistently ranked well, received awards and won contests. The people around me (staff members in athletics, fellow students, clients, etc.) always spoke of my future "you're going to go places", "you're going to be a millionaire by 30"... it was flattering, but it didn't sit right. I didn't want the future that they all saw for me!

I made a commitment to myself near the end of my last year of school. I decided that I would listen to my heart rather than "logic" and the people around me. I told myself that I would not take a standard, corporate job... I would explore my options and find or create a future that I loved and that I know would allow me to realize my potential and purpose. To "stamp" that commitment, I intentionally flunked aptitude tests for two of the recruiters and stopped talking to the other. Maybe not the brightest way to handle things... but I wanted to burn the bridges so I couldn't go back on my commitment (**choose with no regret**).

The summer after university was a fun one for me. It was filled with friends, baseball, low rent and no commitments. I worked doing freelance jobs and hung out with the co-op students that were just finishing their degrees. With my extra time I biked and ran and played almost every sport imaginable. It was a summer of pure freedom. I made it a rule that if anybody asked me to do anything remotely active, I would do it (**play with abandon**). That summer, I also spent hours upon hours researching and drafting models and plans for a “sustainable charity”. I spent evenings in the library, I visited close to 20 charities in the region, I spoke to people who had experience in both the non-profit world and “hardcore” business world... it was a summer of a LOT of learning (**continue to learn**).

By the end of the summer I had a stack of theories and conceptual models for how to conduct a business whose primary purpose wasn't to make a profit, but rather to impact lives. I had a fire in me to change the world. To somehow blend the power of money and business with the overwhelming needs in the world. I dreamed of developing a business where there was a wall with photos on it; photos of people with smiles; people that had been impacted by the business. That was to be the measuring stick of success. If the photos were disappearing or not increasing... then the business was not accomplishing its goals; regardless of profitability. It was with this thought and model that everyone in the organization would realize new purpose to their work... not just working to profit the owners or support a family, but to impact others. People could know that the extra effort made today contributed to the face and smile on the wall... in a very real way.

This was the first kernel of thought that eventually evolved into Robin Hood Technology; a business that worked to take resources from the rich and distribute them to the poor.

My priorities in life were: God, my family and this passion that I had for helping others. I had a passion and an excitement to start out on a path that others hadn't taken. I had a fire to truly understand and make a change in my world. What I didn't have though, was a plan. To date, I have run businesses for years but not once have I made an official “plan”.

The purpose of Robin Hood Technology was to serve as a tool to collect resources (time, money, networks, etc.) and distribute them to those in need; providing others with opportunities so they could make positive choices. I did not have a plan though. I was happy to be programming, something I really enjoyed doing (**do what you love**) and figured that with the passion in me, the charitable side would just flow together naturally. This was a poor choice.

As the business began; at first in the basement of a Waterloo house and then in my current basement apartment, all looked OK. I was making enough money to cover my expenses. I was working flexible and low hours. I was able to exercise

and be involved in my community. After one year of working steadily and really enjoying myself, it dawned on me that I wasn't making the impact that I had initially set out to make.

I was involved in volunteering with several not-for-profits and I was making a comfortable living. I knew though that I was capable of more. I remember I had been processing this thought for a while and one night just as I went to bed, I remember speaking to God and saying... I'm comfortable right now. I'm blessed and things are going well. I know I'm capable of more though... and that's what I want. I'm not pursuing that dream that I initially had and I need to. I believe that the potential for that goal of mine lies in this business, so whatever it takes to grow this business; I will do it. I know it won't be easy, that it will take hours of labour, lots of setbacks and many years of sacrifice... but I will do it.

Over the next three to four years, I grew a business quickly and accomplished a lot. At first glance it would appear that the decision to commit to growing the business was a very positive one for me. In reality though, it was not.

A short while ago...

The view from 1000 feet. It's a business term that is used to describe somebody's analysis of a situation from a distance. It's very difficult for people to identify issues or the reality of a situation when they are directly involved or "in the middle" of it. I recently flew to Europe... it was dark for most of the trip, but as the morning arrived and we were slowly descending over France I could see the ground appear and was able to view the world from a completely different perspective. It was awesome.

I'm not a poet so I don't know how to cleverly tie this into my next thought, but that 1000 foot image very clearly defines what was going through my mind while I travelled on that plane. Over the previous 1-2 three months I had started to realize more and more about the situation I had created in life. It was a slow process where I was noticing the little things, like how infrequently I saw my friends... or how guilty I felt to leave the office without my laptop or a list of work to do that night.

Just like an airplane descending. At first there are clouds in your way so you can just barely make out some green trees or brown land. As you get lower, those clouds eventually disappear entirely and you can see everything clearly and all at once. It was on that multi hour airplane trip that I finally saw things clearly.

Why did it suddenly dawn on me there? That airplane trip was the start to a four week vacation for me. It was the first time in over three years that I had taken a substantial time away from the office. Perhaps it was because that was the first time in four years that I was able to let my mind slow down? I was on route to a different country with a different language and different people. An adventure...

something I love, but hadn't participated in since before university. Perhaps it was the feeling of being on the verge of something different that spurred on my thoughts? Or perhaps it was the low oxygen in the cabin? I don't know... but I know that it hit me hard. This 1000 foot view was not a beautiful one!

I've been "in business" since I was a young teenager. This August will mark my fourth year in business with Robin Hood Technology. Two years as a sole proprietor and two years as a corporation. On paper, the business is solid. 3 full time staff members and 2 partners, over 200 active clients, a portfolio of over 350 successful projects, virtually no corporate debt, annual revenues on track for seven figures within the next 4 quarters, a solid product and new opportunities planned and poised for the next 6 quarters. On any casual business valuation, RHT would rank well. The problem is... RHT has not accomplished its purpose.

If I set out to build a sail boat, but ended up building a house; even if it's a great house and one of the best around. I was still unsuccessful. Robin Hood Technology does not have a single photo of a smile on the wall. It works to sustain its staff, but does not work to impact the world around itself.

Not only has RHT not accomplished its primary purpose; it has been the catalyst for many poor choices I have made over the past several years. My 1000 foot view showed me a lot...

It showed me that I was horribly out of shape. I used to be a solid 170 pounds of active body mass. Recently I was up to a sloppy 210 pounds. I've not run consistently for well over a year and haven't been embracing competitive sports like I know love to. I eat fast and easy meals because I need to get back to work. **(practice wellness)**

It showed me that my time balance was extremely "out of whack". Over the 4 years of business I have worked up to a steady 115 hour week and averaged a 65 hour week consistently. That may not seem like a lot, but that's a 10 hour day, every day of the week... for 4 years straight.

It showed me that I hadn't spent time with my family and friends. I would occasionally see friends maybe once every couple months. Even then I would be tired or focused on business and that would lead my discussions. My ability to truly listen and enjoy and be excited about other's lives wasn't there at all. I remember when I used to spend time with my friends on the streets... I would sit and listen intently to some people for an hour straight. I couldn't imagine doing that now... I have work to do, things to accomplish! **(listen hard), (appreciate your friends)**

It showed me that I hadn't had FUN in a very long time. I had become a solemn, boring, tired person that I didn't even enjoy hanging out with. **(play with abandon), (laugh)**

It showed me that I had not development myself properly for a very long time. I am a person that LOVES to learn and challenge myself. I love to research and understand anything and everything. I hadn't taken the time to read a book on non-business topic since university. (**continue to learn**)

It showed me that while I had always known my priorities, I had let them slip and change. It showed me that I was making daily, small decisions that did not add up to what I wanted of life. It meant that I was making incorrect BIG decisions that were impacting my small ones.

It showed me that change was needed. Immediately.

The days ahead...

I started out this letter by explaining my perspective on decisions and opportunities. It's based on that perspective that I can tell you, with confidence that the place I am at in life is one hundred percent my doing. It has been my choices and decisions that have defined me and what I have accomplished... and not accomplished. I cannot blame anyone else or say that it was just the situations I had that have brought me to where I am today. I take full ownership of every one of my decisions. Good and bad.

I used to exercise twice daily and be involved in several sports at a time. I justified this away by convincing myself that I couldn't afford leagues and that I would workout on my own with the first spare time that I had. This never happened because I rarely had spare time and if I did, I was too tired to exercise.

I used to travel to see friends every other weekend. I justified this away by convincing myself that the fuel and costs of repair were just too much. I could stay in touch with email and phone calls.

I used to read the news and books on general topics that excited me. I justified this away by telling myself that I was learning daily by running a business and reading articles from my business web sites.

I used to be involved with many volunteer agencies and would help out anybody and every body around me. I justified this away by telling myself that I needed to take care of me first. I needed to focus on work to increase my finances so I could then properly give to others. I need to work harder so that I would then have more free time to then volunteer.

I used to be FUN. I justified this away by convincing myself that life is serious and people don't understand what it takes to accomplish something great. It requires focus and dedication... great things don't happen by "goofing around". Wrong!

It's amazing how easy it is to justify our own poor decisions... and remove our ownership from them. That's exactly what I did in the moment. I blamed the situation and told myself that this is what I have to do. Other people don't understand your situation... you really don't have any choice.

I chose the quote at the beginning of this letter for a reason. Not because it provides me with a goal and an outline for things I wish to accomplish. I saw this quote recently and it surprised me. This is a list of things that I've once had and done... and was passionate about, but lost. They are still in me and ready to come out. It has just been my poor decisions for the past while that have pushed back these values. It is my intention to not let this happen any longer.

Over the past month I have attempted to learn as much as I can from my now clear view. I do not regret my choices over the past years. Without them I would not have the perspective and experience that I do today. What I would regret is if I had this perspective today and did not take proper action to correct my decisions and to do what I could to prevent myself from making the same mistakes twice.

I know that many of you don't believe in God and that's OK. But I do. 2 months ago, again just before I was off to bed, I can recall a long conversation with God. I was starting to realize some of the details of my situation (I was a fat workaholic with poor life balance that was not accomplishing what I originally set out to do). As much as I was starting to realize the errors, I didn't know how to fix them. I'm a problem solver, it's in my blood... but I just couldn't see a solution to start to pull myself out of the hole of poor decisions. I asked God and said... whatever it takes to get me back on track... please do it. I know its going to be hard and will likely hurt more than a band-aid... but I want it. I didn't know that this was even a request that was possible... but it was the desire of my heart, so I asked.

Through a series of situations like being in a different country, being away from work, facing the reality of my poor decisions and so much more... this request was accomplished. This past 2-3 months has not been easy. It has been a very humbling time for me. I don't believe that it's appropriate to provide the very specifics of this transitional time in my life; but I can assure you this. God can make things happen fast... so be very careful what you ask for. I say that sincerely!

I went from being in a cloud and in a world of poor decisions to having clarity and a brand new perspective. It is my intention to never lose the perspective that I've gained today and to take action.

Why are you reading this...

You are reading this because if you really want to help me... you can give just one dollar a day! That's less than the price of a cup of coffee! I'm kidding... that's NOT why you're reading this. Joking aside... you could sponsor a child for that price and make a huge impact.

One thing that I've learned over time is that one person can NOT change the world. Yes, they can ignite a spark and gain a following... but true, meaningful impact requires many people. We are inherently programmed to need people around us. People to support, encourage and challenge us... and to join in those things that we are passionate about! We need people to provide us with opportunities and to help us make positive decisions.

I now know my priorities in life...

1. God
2. Health and Fitness
3. Family and Friends
4. Passion and Purpose

I am making daily decisions to work towards them. Over the past month, I have already begun to correct my lifestyle and poor decisions. I need your help to keep me on track. I need accountability to not only the major priorities and big decisions in life... but the little ones too. I've started to develop goals and to take steps towards what I know I wish to do. If I share them here with you today, I know that you can help hold me to them. Just the very act of sending you this letter will help hold me accountable.

God: I grew up in a very religious household. While I may not still hold true to the beliefs that I was taught as a child; I do respect and value God. I know that there is purpose to life and a God that relates to us as much as we relate to him. Please hold me accountable to maintaining that relationship with God. To share daily; and to never lose the humbling perspective that this creates.

Health and Fitness: I cannot help others if I am not healthy, fit and well rested. It's been amazing how much rest, exercise and good eating have done for my mind and attitude. I am a person who needs daily activity... and involvement in competitive sport. Please hold me accountable to be exercising daily and always enrolled in at least one competitive league. Along with this priority comes life balance. Please hold me accountable to a maximum 45 hour work week and daily rest of at least 7 hours (anything less results in a "foggy Jeremy").

Family & Friends: I've always valued friends and family, but this is one of the first things that I have poorly prioritized. I've placed passion and purpose above family and friends. Please hold me accountable to taking steps towards

establishing a family. Please hold me accountable to making time for friends, to supporting and creating opportunities for my family before others. Please hold me accountable to not let this slip below Passion and Purpose as a priority.

Passion and Purpose: Since the middle of university I have had a drive and passion for developing a sustainable charity. I must take steps to exploring this idea. Above this though, I have a drive to properly understand the needs and injustices in the world so that I can effectively and efficiently have a positive impact. Please hold me accountable to understanding and exploring my world and these injustices. I love to be involved in my community... and I love basketball. Please hold me accountable to developing my involvement with local basketball; either through coaching, managing or general support.

An overlapping priority to me is learning. With learning comes knowledge... and with knowledge, the ability to make faster and better decisions. I love to learn. Please hold me accountable to always be learning. Enrolled in or planning to be enrolled in a course... and reading at least one book.

You are reading this, because I need you. I need your support and encouragement. **(appreciate your friends)** There is no need to reply or comment on my words here. I just pray that you will choose to support me in my decisions. Hold me accountable to my words today. Choose to take the time to call or email me in the future and ask me if I am staying true to my priorities and still making good decisions. Don't hold back... be blunt and ask the hard questions. I need that and I want that.

In appreciation for your support, let me share with you the main things that I've learned from my experiences. I know this list will grow, but please consider it carefully. These are not just random words on a screen... these are based on my experience and past decisions.

1. Know what you prioritize. Realize it. Believe it. Be aware of those priorities in every decision you make.
2. Be aware of your decisions. From the small ones, to the BIG ones... don't rob yourself of the control you have in your life.
3. Listen to your wife/girlfriend/boyfriend/husband/children/friends. They speak in love... and there is always truth in love. Don't block them out. Take the time to carefully listen and consider what they have to say.
4. Make time. Never let time restrict your decisions. If it is something important to you (based on your priorities) make the time and I can assure you that everything else will work out.

Thank you for reading this. I really do appreciate your time and your friendship.