

Don't Make the Right Decision; Make the Decision Right by Adam Grant

How do you make your choices? Here are a few statements from a decision-making survey created by my colleague, Barry Schwartz. Take a moment to think about whether you agree with them:

- I never settle for second best.
- When I'm in the car listening to the radio, even if I like the song, I often check other stations to see if something better is playing.
- I'm a big fan of lists that rank things: the best movies ... the best graduation speeches ... the best-looking professors.
- I treat relationships like clothing: I expect to try on a lot before I find the perfect fit.

These statements reflect being a maximizer—someone who always looks for the best option when making decisions. But is seeking the best always what's best for you, or does being a maximizer come with a cost?

Researchers Sheena Iyengar, Rachael Wells, and Barry Schwartz explored this question in a study of over 500 college seniors searching for jobs. In the fall, the seniors completed surveys to identify the maximizers in the group. Over the following six months, all of the students reported on their progress.

As expected, maximizers did better than their peers. They applied for many more jobs and ended up accepting jobs with 20% higher salaries. This was true even after controlling for their universities, grades, and majors. Looking for the best paid off.

Here's the surprise: despite doing better, maximizers actually felt worse. They experienced more negative emotions during the job search, were less satisfied with the jobs they accepted, and were more likely to question whether they made the right decision. Why? They spent more time comparing their outcomes to their peers to figure out whether they really had the "best" job, and ruminated more about "what if" scenarios. Searching for the best made them less happy.

What was different about the students who were happy with their job choices, despite earning lower salaries than the maximizers? These students are what we call satisficers, people who choose an option that's just good enough for them. Instead of spending their lives chasing after the best possible job, car, house, or romantic partner, satisficers take the first acceptable option that comes to them, and they're usually happier with their

choices as a result.

I think there's a lesson in this for all of us. If you care about your happiness, not only your success, there's wisdom in aiming for good instead of best. This is especially important for those of you who cried when you got your first A- or wallowed in despair when you graduated with "only" a 3.99 GPA.

So my advice to you is this: every once in a while, set your sights a little lower, and settle for good enough. When you hear a song you like on the radio, keep listening to it. When you find a great restaurant, go there more than once. When you fall in love, don't keep looking for someone better.

Granted, sometimes you'll sacrifice a bit of success. But here's the punch line, the most valuable advice I ever received on choices:

Don't make the right decision; make the decision right." -- Ellen Langer

You'll face plenty of win-win choices in your life. The quality of the decision you make will be determined not by picking the right one, but by the actions you take post-decision to make the most of it.