

DECISION MAKING AND THE FOG OF EMOTIONS

Anger, jealousy, lust, hate, love, revenge, competitive drive etc., a very long list of the emotions we experience that are all provoked by our interactions with other people and have their origins in the *instinctual* drives of our *id*. It is these feelings about other people that impact our decisions as we move through both our personal relationships as well as our business career.

There are few who would disagree that when these emotions are raging inside of us, we do not think clearly, and at times we even try to put off decision making until we calm down. That is in the extreme case where we have a clear conscious appreciation of the impact these feelings have upon our ability to make productive decisions. How about when these emotions are maybe at such a low level we are not even consciously aware of their presence. Could they still be playing a *conscious* or even *unconscious* role in our decision making?

The answer is a clear yes. Again, whether these are feelings we experience consciously or unconsciously, they are without a doubt intruding into our ability to see things with Clarity and make a decision. Sitting across a table in a business meeting, how do we feel about the person on the other side of the table with whom we are negotiating. Maybe it is your boss; on a daily basis are feelings of anger, jealousy, or competitiveness coloring your interactions with them. Just how resentful are you with your spouse about what they said yesterday when it comes time to make a joint decision today? Does that resentment carry over and bias your decision?

We all like to think we make rational and logical decisions. Are the terms in this contract the right ones? How big an argument should I make when I think my boss asked

me to do something that is the wrong thing to do? Should I let my daughter go out on a date with that guy? Important decisions with consequences; without a doubt we want to make the right decision. In order to make the right decision we must insure as much as possible that the decision is based on an objective and logical analysis of the facts. That we have various feelings, either positive or negative toward these other people should not be allowed to taint our thinking one way or another. Our *ego's defense mechanisms* must not be allowed to create a fog of emotions that keep us from seeing ourselves and others with Clarity.

It is only natural that we have these various feelings as a result of our interactions with other people. They are a part of being human. Yet they can lead to no end of trouble when we let them intrude into our decision making. My various careers and moving from one job to another allowed me to view not only my own ups and downs, but others as well. I was fortunate to rub shoulders in academic medicine and in business with those who achieved the pinnacle of success, from Nobel Prize winning scientists to the making of billion dollar fortunes.

I had the privilege of working with two of the captains of our high-tech business and financial revolution. One inherited a great industrial fortune based upon “rust-belt” industries and had the foresight to convert them into the progenitors of what has become an industrial empire for the next century. In addition, he is the godfather, both financially and intellectually, of venture capital and leveraged buy-outs. The second is one of the pioneers of applying high-technology to create many of our current century’s leading industries, from computers to genetic engineering.

When I was working alongside these fellows I was constantly trying to be aware of how they worked, dealing with people and solving problems. The single-most distinguishing characteristic of both these fellows was the cold, crystal-clear Clarity of their thought processes. They brought tremendous focus on their goals and approached achieving them with a purity of objective analysis. Their competitive drive fueled their single minded focus, but emotional feelings toward people never ever intruded into the decision making about how to achieve their goals.

We all feel emotions every day. Our eyes and ears see and hear things that evoke these feelings. In addition, our internal daydreams, the idle thoughts that pass through our minds during the course of the day of past slights contribute to the emotional ups and down we experience. These mental activities go on both *consciously* and *unconsciously*. With the *conscious* ones it is easy to understand how the conversation we just had or the remembrance of a past event provoked these feelings. However, there is an *unconscious* life going on in our minds as well. This life also makes us have certain feelings, our moods that at times seem to mysteriously come and go as immortalized in the saying as a way to explain this mysterious ebb and flow: "I must have gotten up on the wrong side of the bed".

These moods are just as real as the rest of our feelings. What is very important to understand is that the primary origins of our moods and our feelings are from this *unconscious* mental life. It is a human trait that we have to attach our feelings to something in our *conscious* world, something we saw, heard, or remembered. Our lives are very complex and at any time there is always some current or recent event available

which we can label as the cause of these feelings and moods, our ups and downs with their true origins in that mysterious world of our *unconscious*.

There is a danger in this process whereby we attach feelings to the usual suspects that pass through our lives on a daily basis. Our psyche's need to explain these feelings to ourselves through the use of *ego defense mechanisms* can lead to unjustifiably pinning that tail on an innocent donkey. More than one relationship has probably run aground as a result of this psychological process.

The decisions we make determine the course of lives. Whether our I.Q. is 115 or 140, a natural born leader or not, a numbers person or a people person, if we are to utilize our natural talents to the fullest, we must be able to make good decisions. Decisions that are not based upon our viewing the world through the distorting fog of emotions (*ego defense mechanisms*). This awareness is a necessary tool whose use we must master. We must develop an ability to constantly monitor our own thought processes to see how our emotional feelings are distorting our perceptions of people and events in our lives. It is only through achieving this Clarity of Purpose & Thought then Action that we will be able to maximize our potential and achieve the realistic goals we have set for ourselves.