

FOUNDATION FOR SUSTAINABLE PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT and 'Humanizing the Workplace'

Part IV:

CONSCIOUS DECISION MAKING - CONSCIOUS ACTING ON DECISIONS

Will Integrity - The 5th condition for sustainable development

Yehuda Tagar

Personal development is the deepest drive in human life. In adulthood, when natures' and parental gifts are completed, personal development takes place only through individual choice and initiative. Sustainable personal development starts from taking one's normal life as a spiritual exercise, living it with a higher ethical standard. In 1904, Rudolf Steiner outlined seven basic conditions for sustainable initiatory personal development¹. In this article, the focus is on the 5th condition-The commitment to making conscious decisions and to act on these decisions.

We shape our lives by the decisions that we make and by the way we follow, or not follow them into action. The rich content of human life contains experiences, memories, thinking, feeling and acts of will. What we do, more than anything else, forms who we become. The 19th century English poet Gerard Manley Hopkins stated in one of his sonnets: "*What I do is me: for that I came*"².

This article has two parts: Conscious decision making and conscious action on decisions.

1. The process of Conscious Decision Making

Many people find decision making to be challenging. It is the fear that every decision I make will have an effect on an unknown future. Decisions such as marriage, professional direction, job, location of residence, involvement in initiatives, relationship to enter or not – each will drastically effect my life in the future in which everything I know today might change. How can I responsibly commit today to what will have an effect on so many unknown tomorrows? It is an act of - taking a risk, trust, inner authority, leadership, taking responsibility and intuition. I need to be sure that I am acting from the right place in me, doing something I will not regret later, something I will be proud of and peaceful about in the future.

¹ Steiner, R. (1994). *How to Know Higher Worlds: A Modern Path of Initiation, 1904–1905* (CW 10). Hudson, NY: Anthroposophic Press. Chapter 5: The conditions of esoteric training

² '*As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame*' by Gerard Manley Hopkins, in *Poems and Prose*. Penguin Classics (1985)

The Psychophonetics process of sustainable decision-making aims to ensure that when I make a decision it is based on my core identity, deeper than any passing changes. What motivates me today could disappear tomorrow. What I regard today as success, achievement, prestige, rewards, may all be irrelevant in a few years. Decisions based on these desires activate only a shallow level of human will. Only decisions made out of love for the deed itself, coming from the deepest, heart-based dimension of my humanity, have a chance of being guided by the 'inner moral compass' that will express me tomorrow as well as today.

In order to make a decision that expresses my deepest wisdom I need to *sleep on it*. We spend one third of our lives sleeping, for a very good reason, as sleep refreshes body, soul, mind and spirit. We forget what happens in sleep, but we know it to be a good place for restoring our wholeness. Therefore, paradoxically, in teaching the process of conscious decision making we involve the wisdom of sleep. Psychophonetics methodical decision making involves three nights of sleep and four meditations on the way to finalize a decision.

In preparation for a methodical process of decision making, the following must be accomplished:

1. A decision to decide. This mobilizes the will and activates inner authority.
2. A decision about the time by which the decision is to be finalized, to ground the process in time.
3. The formation of at least two options between which to decide. Freedom starts from options to choose from. This is the most creative phase. Alternative options are sought, created and explored, which enables a peacefulness of mind in which to observe the merit of each option objectively. It is also the time for collecting information, research and creative imagination.

Then, four days before the final date for decision the following process is recommended:

Process

Four chairs are placed in a diamond shape. You sit in one corner and in front of you to the right is - option A. In front of you to the left is - option B. Straight ahead and behind the two options you imagine yourself sitting in the future- 1, 5 or 10 years ahead- looking back at yourself now. You build that character with what you know of your highest aspirations for the 'future you'.

However polarized the two options in front of you are, there is no dilemma about the characteristics of the 'future you', as we know intuitively what kind of person we aspire to be. Looking from that perspective, option A and B become different roads towards the same destination of an ideal future self. This process engages a broader intelligence, alleviating the anxiety about the decision by placing it in a context which is free of dilemma.

The process itself is simple: Imagine each of the three positions in front of you, sit in each position and experience each one fully, starting from 'Future Me' and moving into each of the other options. For a moment, let yourself

become the living character of that option, as if it is decided. You get right into each position and right out of it and observe with your activated imagination what it is like.

Then you sleep on it. Repeat this process for two more days, with sleep time between. Each time there will be a different experience. Don't decide until the fourth day.

On that day, enter each of the three positions for the last time, exit and observe them. Then make your decision.

This process ensures that at the time of making the decision, all the available intelligence, knowledge and experience become accessible to you. The final decision comes out of the deepest place in your being.

2. Acting on decisions

Once the decision is made, acting on it is the next challenge. It is common to feel a lack of willpower and to judge ourselves for decisions we fail to act upon. Our sense of self-esteem, self-respect, confidence and integrity depends on our ability to follow up on our commitments. Every decision we make and not act on weakens our will further. The will is like a muscle- if you practice, it becomes stronger. If you don't, it weakens.

Seven aspects of the will

Steiner identified seven components of will³, each corresponding to an aspect of the human constitution⁴. These components act as one chain and each link could break the operation. They have to work together for a decision to become action. In Psychophonetics, this is called 'The Seven Vertebrae of the Will'. Psychophonetics has a process for identifying which of the seven vertebrae is a weak link stopping the flow of will, and a specific process for the strengthening of that vertebra. Like the central nerve cord must flow freely through all the vertebrae, so the will must flow through these vertebrae. These are:

- 1) **Decision** comes first. It is a real deed to decide. If this is half done, action will not follow. The above decision-making process can help.
- 2) **Intention** is the focusing mechanism of the decision, sharpening it into action, creating the implementation process.
- 3) **Wish** is a deep soul aspiration. It engages the depth of the soul in the action. It is the enthusiasm and the spiritual participation in the deed. Nothing happens without wishing it to happen.
- 4) **Motivation** is the most conscious part of the action, sometimes collected over a long period of time. The will is like a river with motivation as its tributaries. The stronger the motivation, the stronger the deed.

³ Steiner, R. (1996). Lecture 4: Stuttgart/Aug 25, 1919. In *The Foundations of Human Experience*, 14 lectures Stuttgart, Aug. 20–Sept. 5, 1919; 2 lectures Berlin, Mar. 15 & 17, 1917. NY: Anthroposophical Press.

⁴ Physical Body, Life Body, Sentient Soul, I (+ Personal Soul), Consciousness Soul (+ Individualized Spirit), Life Spirit (Bodhi), Human Spirit (Atman). See Steiner, 'Theosophy', chapter 1.

Opposing motivations split the will into a state of paralysis. Awareness of the various motivations helps clear the path for action.

- 5) **Desire** is the engine for any action; the fire, the 'horsepower', the motion. Action follows strong desire. Desire is a force of nature. It can be tamed into collaborating with the highest intentions, but it must be engaged and respected. It is the horse we ride to our chosen destination.
- 6) **Drive/Stamina/Life Energy** is the fuel for action. The body needs food, a car needs petrol, and a person needs life forces to act on decisions. Rest, sleep, nurturing, space, time, self-care, strength, support, companionship, and working conditions are needed to accomplish any deed.
- 7) **Instinct** is the deepest dimension of will. A deed will only be accomplished if one's instinct cooperates with it. Nothing can happen without the participation of one's survival mechanism. Fear lives there alongside courage; antipathy alongside sympathy, as well as attraction and repulsion. They can be transformed into one another, but only through conscious penetration into the instinctual dimension of the will.

Each of these seven vertebrae of the will can be the reason why a good decision cannot become action. By consciously penetrating each of them, a good decision can then become action. This description of the fifth condition applies to the life of an individual. The same can be translated into the life of a group, organization, community, family or business. For most people the fifth condition is the most challenging of the seven as the will is the least conscious and most powerful of all the soul forces. We become what we do, and to be a free human being one has to wake up to the nature of what makes us do what we do - the human will.