

MARYELLEN TRIBBY PRESENTS

The Decision Tree



**Your Fool-Proof Method to Making Great Decisions,
Making More Money and Enjoying a Better Life**

The Decision Tree: Your Fool-Proof Method to Making Great Decisions, More Money and Enjoying a Better Life

By MaryEllen Tribby

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Sometimes it's in our DNA

I had my very first job when I was 10 years old. I delivered our local newspaper.

The papers would arrive in our driveway by 5:00 a.m each weekday. I was up by 5:30. I would load the papers on the back of my bicycle and by 7:00 a.m. when most 10 year olds were just waking and starting on their Captain Crunch I had already delivered the newspaper to 34 homes. More importantly by 7:00 a.m. each morning I had an overwhelming sense of accomplishment.

In 1971 there were three main television stations, a few AM radio stations and NO Internet. The daily newspaper was the window to the world for most people in my hometown. It introduced us to people and places most of my townsmen would never meet or see in their lifetime. It brought excitement, intrigue and tragedy into their lives, making me the conduit between them and the rest of the world.

I knew all of my customers by name. I knew their kids names, their grandkids names. I even knew their dogs, cats and birds names; and all my customers knew me.

You may be thinking that, who the heck was up at 5:30 to meet and greet me. Well, there were a few during the week but it was on Saturday that my paper route turned into a party on wheels.

During the week, I could get my route done within in 75 minutes but on Saturdays it took about 2 hours.

The paper did not get to my house until 9:00 a.m. So when I would deliver the Saturday edition many of my customers were already out side; raking leaves, washing cars or cleaning out their garage. But what ever they were doing they always stopped to talk to me.

This did not bother me. In fact, I enjoyed talking to my customers. They told me fascinating stories about their lives. They invited me into their homes, and share life long souvenirs. Weather it was an exotic stamp collections or family photos, I felt honored that they wanted to share those moments with me. They would ask me in for breakfast. I sampled goodies I did not know existed. Treats like chocolate chip pancakes, croissants and crepes. Nothing like the oatmeal I was use to. And on a couple occasions they even washed my bicycle.

Here were people just a few months prior were complete strangers and now they were surrogate parents, grandparents, aunts an uncles; people that surprised me with birthday cards and welcomed me into their lives

My customers were not only fascinated by this little ten year old girl who knew more about what was going on in the world than most of their friends, golf partners and colleagues, they actually cared about me, and I them.

I later realized the reason I enjoyed my conversations with my customers so much was because there was so little conversation in the home I was growing up in. In fact it seemed like all my brothers, sister and I did was listen. Listen to my parents, actually my mother complain. Mostly complain about money, that we did not have enough of , or about her job and how much she hated what they did for a living.

It was because of my mothers distain for her job and her considerable lack of discretion, that I asked if I could have a paper route in the first place.

The 5:00 Whistle Was The Devil in Disguise

Like most middle class families in the early seventies we played outside after school regardless of the season. Unless there was a severe rainstorm we were, jumping rope, playing ball, riding bikes or doing any numerous activities kids used to do. As long as we stayed in the neighborhood and were within “calling” distance we could pretty much do what ever we wanted.

The time between 3:00 in the afternoon and 5:00 pm. was what I labeled as my kid time. It was the only time during the day that I felt like a 10 year old. It was the only time during the day that I acted like every other kid I knew, or least I thought it was.

Once that 5:00 whistle blew I knew the daily saga was about to begin. There could be 25 kids from the neighborhood playing and in mid swing, jump or sentence, once that whistle blew everything stopped and all the kids scurried home. We were like little mice being chased by an oversized cat.

By 5:15 my entire family was seated at our dinner table prepared but not looking forward to the habitual rant about my mothers’ lousy day. It always started the same way with the horrible traffic. A ride that should take 30 minutes turns into 45 minutes because of the number of cars on the street. Even at ten years old I understood the irony of traffic and how miserable the daily commute could be. People would complain about it all the time yet they were part of it. Essentially, they were just complaining about themselves.

From that point it always got worse. My mother would complain about the sick kids. Again, I thought about the irony. You see my mother was the school nurse. Yet she did not particularly like children and she especially did not like sick ones.

One night I interrupted the daily monologue and stated what seemed like the obvious; that if there were no sick children she would not have a job. This did not go over well. Since I knew the outcome would not be particularly favorable for me I took it one step further. I had the audacity to ask why she had children in the first place and four of us at that.

I was prepared for immediate sanction to my room after a good smack. But what I got instead was an epiphany of a lifetime. My mother just looked straight ahead not at anyone of her 5 family members and simply said, "Because that's what I thought I was suppose to do".

That night at ten years old I vowed to myself that I would never have a job that I did not like and that if was ever blessed enough to have children they would know they were wanted and loved.

Money May Have Started It...

I just wanted to save \$1,000 dollars. For some reason in my 10 year old mind \$1,000 was a lot of money. And if I had \$1,000 I would be able to move out. Since \$1,000 was a lot of money and if I wanted to move out when I was 18 I needed to start saving now.

The day after the infamous dinner, I asked my father if I could get a paper route. He told me that I could not because I was too young. That one needed to be 12 to have a paper route. Since I already knew this from an older kid at school, I was prepared. I said that since my brother was 12, we could register the route under his name but I would deliver the paper and of course keep all the money.

My father was born in 1929 in a somewhat undesirable neighborhood so he was impressed with my initiative to earn money. He too had started in the wonderful world of employment at they age of ten out of necessity to eat. Even though we had the essentials of food and shelter he thought I wanted the money for the extras that we rarely got. So he was thrilled that I had thought ahead and he agreed to register the route under my brothers' name.

Within a week I had my route and was one day closer to my \$1,000.

One Dime At A Time

I heard from the older kid at school that his tip was a dime a house. I had 34 houses on my route, which meant I could make \$3.40 a week, \$176.80 a year and in 8 years I would have \$1,414.4, which exceeded my goal of \$1,000, I was thrilled.

Because I knew what I was working for (or so I thought) I delivered that paper everyday with pride and enthusiasm. Soon my average tip went from \$.10 a house to \$.12 to \$.15 to \$.20 a house a week. I was making twice as much as the older kid doing the same job!

But so many other things were happening than just making money, things that were much more important though I did not realize it at the time.

For one, I read the paper everyday. But since my day started so very early I read it in the evening, which almost landed me as an outcast with my own family. Like so many other families after dinner, clean up and homework it was TV time. I guess watching TV was just easier than talking.

But soon I was giving up Bonanza, Laugh In and The Partridge Family to read the paper. (Ok, I'll admit it I put the paper down when Keith Partridge sang, I was just ten after all.)

Next, I starting having conversations with people. I spoke with my customers, teachers and my friends about what was going on in the world. It was the first time I could talk about something other than our local football team score or who was on the TV Guide.

Finally and most importantly, I enjoyed getting up early and getting my day going. I loved what I did and I got paid to do it.

I did not realize it then but 1971 not only laid the foundation for my adolescences but for my entire adult life. It is profound to think that a single statement that caused me so much pain at the time is responsible for the success today.

Find the Right Balance

“I can’t believe he called you at 9:00 at night. You don’t think that is totally inappropriate?” asked my sister-in-law Connie.

When I told her I did not, and was happy he’d called, her jaw dropped even further.

We were talking about a business colleague of mine. “Larry” had called to ask me if I could speak with his mastermind group on a teleconference later that week.

He wanted me to speak to the group about accelerating their businesses growth via multi-channel marketing. Given the fact that his attendee list included people like Alex Mandossian, Tony Robbins, and John Carlton -people I personally considered my mentors - I was honored to accept.

When I tried explaining this to my sister-in-law, she just waved her hand and said, “In my day, when you left the office at 5:00, you were done until 9:00 the next morning.”

I thought about dropping the subject, but I couldn’t resist the challenge.

She opted for early retirement about six years ago -but I asked her if, during her working years, she’d ever left the office to pick up a sick kid from school, go to a dentist appointment, or meet the cable man at her house.

When she begrudgingly nodded her head yes, I knew I had her attention. And I hope I have yours as well. If you think that your work life exists only between 9:00 and 5:00 ... and that your home and social life exist only between 5:00 and 9:00, you need to make a change.

I recommend that you resolve, right here and now, to make your life better, more rewarding, and more balanced. And I’m going to help you do it.

Who am I to talk about balance? Well, I’m a happily married mother of three who runs a 25-person business. Over the past few years, I’ve gotten pretty good at managing all the different aspects of my life in a way that makes me feel happy and proud.

The very first step to creating a happier, healthier lifestyle is to realize that “9:00 to 5:00” no longer applies. By giving yourself the flexibility to do business at all hours of the day or night, you are actually better able to enjoy both your work and your family even more.

This may sound counter-intuitive but by taking the following five simple steps, you will be able to break free of the 9:00 to 5:00 shackles.

Creating Balance Step One: Define what a balanced life means to you.

Many people think that having a balanced life means spending the same number of hours on work as you do on personal activities. This is a big mistake, because most of the time it just is not realistic.

To define what will work for you, you need to take into consideration that life is constantly changing. And the right balance for you today may not be the right balance for you tomorrow or next week or next month, because over time your priorities change. The one constant in knowing you have a balanced life is the feeling of accomplishment and happiness you enjoy every day.

Creating Balance Step Two: Create Boundaries

Some people may agree with my sister-in-law that receiving a business call at 9:00 at night is inappropriate. But the way I look at it is that Larry is someone who is good for my organization and good for my career. Besides, when I met him at a conference earlier this year, he asked me for the best way to reach me. I gave him my e-mail address and my cell number. So why shouldn't he call?

And keep in mind that I made the decision to take his call that night -I created the boundary. It happened to be a good time to talk. However, if he'd made the call 90 minutes earlier -when I was spending time with my kids and my husband -I would have let it go to voice mail and called him back when it was convenient for me.

Later that week, I was the keynote speaker on the mastermind teleconference Larry had invited me to. Many of the attendees learned a great deal. In fact, I got several e-mails from attendees saying they'd purchased the book on multichannel marketing that I co-authored with Michael Masterson. Others called or e-mailed to ask if they could promote the book to their in-house list.

Had I adopted the attitude that I would do business only from 9:00 to 5:00, I may have lost out on a wonderful opportunity that proved to be valuable both to ETR and to me personally.

Because I advocate balance, I support the efforts my team members make in striving for balance in their own lives. Some of them work in the evening and/or on the weekends. So I have no problem with it if they need to leave to take care of something personal. I

truly believe that your accomplishments aren't dependent on how much time you spend in the office.

Creating Balance Step Three: Learn how to say “No.”

No one wants to say no to their boss, their spouse, their employees, their friends, or their kids. But to achieve balance, you are going to have to do it once in a while.

We all have the same 24 hours in a day. And we cannot possibly do everything that we want to do AND everything that everyone else wants us to do. So a big part of leading a more balanced life is to cut down on unnecessary tasks and protect your priorities.

When requests or conflicts are set before you, ask yourself: “Is this going to give me a feeling of accomplishment and a feeling of happiness?”

Almost four years ago, a good friend of mine -“Rita” -wanted my husband and me to meet her new boyfriend. He was “the one” as she put it. So we made dinner plans for the following evening.

But when our two-month-old baby Delanie woke up in the morning, she had a fever. I called Rita and apologized, but told her we would have to cancel. I just did not feel right about leaving the baby with a sitter.

Rita was irate. She said I was overreacting, and asked how I could possibly feel that way given that Delanie was our third child.

As I held Delanie though the day and night, I knew I had made the right decision. But I was saddened by Rita's anger - and her anger lasted for weeks.

Then, about five weeks after the infamous missed dinner, Rita called to say that “the one” had dumped her. This time it was her turn to apologize, saying that now she realized I had made the right decision.

Social decisions are one thing, but work decisions can be more difficult. You must learn that sometimes you have to choose your family, your health, or even your social life over work. And you'll also have to make some hard decisions to put work first.

For instance, I take my health seriously. But last week, a doctor's appointment conflicted with a last-minute visit from one of Agora's top executives. The only chance I had to see him was during the time I'd reserved for my appointment. Since I wasn't sick and the appointment was for a simple check up, I didn't think twice about rescheduling.

Creating Balance Step Four: Keep a journal.

The only way to make your life better is to understand what you're doing, what's working, and what isn't. And there are far too many things going on in our lives to try to keep it all in our heads.

So keep a journal. Write down what you spend time on -everything from the meetings you attend to how many times you go to the gym.

Keeping a journal will help you see if you are spending your time in the most productive way - and it will make you accountable for your actions. It will help you accomplish your professional and personal goals, and will make you proud of those accomplishments.

Creating Balance Step Five: Understand that you're not a superhero.

Having a balanced life means being realistic. Realistic about the fact that some things are just not going to get done. And you have to be okay with that.

When my husband and I got married 12 year ago, we both had busy careers. But we still enjoyed spending time decorating and upgrading our home with art and new furniture. After a busy day, we loved coming home to our immaculate sanctuary.

Well... once we had kids, things started looking a lot different. Instead of the beautiful vase I picked up in Mexico on the coffee table -there was a stuffed Elmo. Soon our Tiffany picture frames were replaced by toy trains. And many days, while we're making dinner, the kids have all the pots and pans on the floor.

But instead of spending my time cleaning up and trying to make my house look perfect, I would much rather play with the kids, banging on the pots and pans with them and play with trains.

There are always things out of place in my house -but that is exactly the way it should be. Because when I come home to my family, I absolutely have a feeling of great accomplishment and happiness!

This goes for work, too. You may have a dozen projects on your plate, and only so much time to complete them. Don't get down on yourself for letting one of them slide so you can spend more time on marketing, or so you can care for your ailing grandmother, or so you can spend an hour at the gym.

Following the other guidelines I've recommended -figuring out what kind of balance is right for you, creating boundaries, picking priorities, and knowing what's working and what isn't -will help you feel confident that your accomplishments are enough... even if you have more goals you want to achieve.

The Balancing Act That's Up to You

People ask me all the time how I run a successful company, raise three small children, travel all around the world, AND manage a household. Essentially, they want to know how I create and maintain balance in my life.

In my experience, the answer is three-fold. It's extremely simple, and something you have total control over. You just need to (1) have the right attitude, (2) make smart choices, and (3) develop positive relationships.

Step #1 to a Balanced Life: Having the Right Attitude

Charles Swindoll is famous for his writings about attitude. One of the things he talks about is the fact that attitude can make or break a company, a church, a home. And that we have a choice, every day, regarding the attitude we will embrace.

MJ, one of the acquaintances I've made in our info-publishing world, runs a nice little consulting company and has two beautiful, healthy little boys and a wonderful husband.

You would think she considers herself to be extremely fortunate. Yet every time I see MJ at an industry function and ask about her family, she starts in about how hard it is to run a company and raise two children. Not only that, she complains about how much more successful she would be if she did not have to take the kids to school and to soccer practice and to play dates.

I have never looked at my children as a hardship. It is a privilege for me (and my husband) to raise them and build our lives together. I am so much better at everything I do because of them. I am a better leader, a better manager, a better multi-tasker, and a better negotiator.

But this positive attitude is not something that magically happened to me.

Early in my career, I was asked to interview for a management position at Forbes -and the competition was fierce. All the candidates had a good education and work experience. Finally, they narrowed their choices down to two of us: me and Natalie.

Natalie had graduated from Harvard, had an MBA from Columbia, and had a reputation for being tough as nails. And seven years later, she still bragged about her perfect SAT scores.

It was finally the day of reckoning -the day of our last interview. But this was not just any old interview. We were both meeting with Steve Forbes himself.

The HR director made it very clear that Mr. Forbes was a busy man. That he would ask the questions and we would answer them. That he would spend no more than 10 minutes with each of us, and that a final decision would be made shortly after he met with us both.

Now Forbes being the intensely competitive place that it is, Natalie and I both wound up sitting outside of Steve Forbes' office at the same time. As I looked over at her, sitting there confidently in her St. John suit, I remember thinking, "I know as much as she does. I can do this."

They called her in first. I heard Mr. Forbes' muffled voice through the door. I heard her muffled reply. This went on for a while, and then I heard laughter. I thought, "How could that be? She was just supposed to answer some questions."

Thirty-five minutes later, Natalie swaggered out, shooting me a grin that said "Don't even bother."

Then it was my turn. I went in. I answered Mr. Forbes' questions. After five minutes, he thanked me and I left.

There was no laughter. No pleasant conversation.

As I opened the door to my Columbus Avenue apartment that I could not really afford, my phone was ringing. You guessed it. It was Forbes. They were calling to offer me the job!

After I'd been there a few months, I mustered up the courage to ask my boss how they made the decision to choose me over Natalie. Her answer rings true in my head more than 20 years later: "Mr. Forbes liked your attitude."

That single experience helped me understand what is really important and what is not. It helped me learn not to sweat the small stuff and not to get upset about things I have no control over. And that brings me to my next point...

Step #2 to a Balanced Life: Making the Right Choices

We all have to make hundreds of choices every day. It starts first thing in the morning. Do you eat your healthy high-fiber cereal with blueberries and skim milk? Or do you eat a chocolate chip muffin with a Starbucks specialty loaded with whipped cream?

As the day goes along, our decisions generally get more complicated and difficult to make.

Last summer, a friend in the industry sent out invitations for a huge networking party he was having at his home in Texas. I was honored to have been invited. Everyone who is anyone in our industry was going to be there. My friend Rich Schefren commented that this was the event of the year, the one that everyone who was lucky enough to be invited should attend.

I immediately RSVP'd, memorized the entire guest list, and thought about all the deals I could make that would benefit ETR. (You may remember the article I wrote recently about the importance of meeting everyone you do business with in person... and how cultivating those relationships can facilitate your deal making.)

That evening, while going over my travel dates with my husband, he pointed out that this networking event was being held on the first day of the new school year.

My husband encouraged me to go on the trip. He assured me that he could handle the kids that day. And, of course, I knew he could. But that was not the point. I told him that my daughter was only going to have one first day of fourth grade. And my son was only going to have one first day of first grade. And I wanted to be there for those once-in-a-lifetime occasions.

He told me to think about it for a few days to make sure I was making the right decision. So I did. I thought about what would happen if I missed the kids' first day of school. I also thought about the business consequences of missing the event.

To help make this decision, I applied my two-two-two rule. I asked myself, "What will be the impact on both sides two weeks from now, two months from now, and two years from now?"

If I missed their first day of school, would my kids still be upset in two weeks? Would they still be upset in two months? And would the disappointment continue to echo in all of our hearts and minds in two years? I knew the answer was yes.

But I couldn't just blow off the networking event. So I went through the same process. I figured that most of the people at the event would remember I had been there after two weeks. But I also figured that the majority of them would not remember I had been there after two months... and that none of them would remember I had been there after two years.

Guess what I decided to do? I skipped the networking event and took the kids to school. And four months later, my son still laughs about how I almost hit his new teacher's car in the parking lot that day.

Of course, I did not just blow off the networking event. ETR's Internet Marketing Director at the time, went and represented ETR proudly. He brought back tons of useful information, and I have since spoken with or met with everyone I would have seen that day.

This dovetails nicely with my final point on creating and maintaining a balanced life...

Step #3 to a Balanced Life: Developing the Right Relationships.

I was fortunate to have someone to send to the networking event I missed. Someone who would represent me and ETR, our core values and our policies. I knew he would see it as an opportunity for him -and that is exactly what happened. Many of the people he met there told me what a great job he did.

Now had I not cultivated my relationship with him over the last 19 months, this would have been a lost opportunity for both of us, instead of a win-win situation. He knew exactly what I expected of him, and he over-delivered.

It's funny. Many high-level executives think that if they cannot be at an important business function, they would rather miss out completely than send a substitute. In fact, one sign of a good leader is that his or her business runs smoothly even when they are not present.

I pride myself on hiring and mentoring people who have as much potential as I do (if not more).

It is the same with my personal relationships.

I have a mother's helper that my kids love... and she loves my kids. And though my friends and family know how happy this makes me, every once in a while someone asks me: "Doesn't it bother you that your kids love Nora so much?" My answer: "Hell no!"

I want people in my life who are good for me. The two stories here are two good examples. These are positive relationships.

Now don't get me wrong, I am not Super Woman. And I have days at home and at the office that are more challenging than others. Sometimes, the only reason I can accomplish as much as I do is because I have a spouse who is my biggest fan, a spouse who never puts his career before mine.

We decided a long time ago that we could accomplish *anything* as long as we were in it together, as long as our goals were in alignment, and as long as our philosophies regarding success were the same.

As Michael Masterson has said, we all have the same 24 hours in a day. So when people tell me there is no way they can maintain balance between their business life and their personal life because they have soooo much work to do, I simply don't buy it.

Everyone can have a balanced life. You just need to want it... and act to achieve it.