



## A OR B?

BY KELLIE WARDMAN

**S**ometimes, you simply have to choose. Do I send my child to this day care or that one? Do I buy this new car or stay with my old, paid-off clunker? Do I take the new job with higher pay but a longer commute? Do I stay in this tired relationship or go out on my own? These are the hardest decisions—when you have two choices that are equally plausible.

I remember once trying to choose between two jobs—they both offered growth opportunities, an increased salary, and a chance to step into new territory. After hemming and hawing for a few days, I finally created a pro and con list, so I would know clearly what the two options had to offer.

Did this help? Not really.

In the end, the list did not point out a clear winner—the pros and cons lists were equally long. So I had to just go with my gut, which is often where you end up in these kinds of situations.

I recently heard Dr. Ben Carson speak at a conference on making choices—Dr. Carson is a pediatric neurosurgeon at Johns Hopkins who was the first to separate craniopagus (Siamese) twins. At the conference, he spoke about risk, and how doctors

often have to make a decision about taking a life or death chance with patients' lives. Before operating on a particular set of conjoined twins, the physicians were struggling with the danger of the operation—one that had never been done successfully before. But the twins said in response, "We'd rather die than continue to live like this."

So Carson and his colleagues tried to separate them. The twins ended up dying on the operating table. But those surgeries led to more surgeries, which led to more learning, which led to eventual success.

Carson struggled at one point in his career with how to make these decisions. But once he simply asked himself, "What's the best thing that can happen if I take this action, and then what's the worst thing that can happen?" And second, he asked himself, "What's the best thing that can happen if I don't do anything, and what's the worst thing that can happen if I don't do anything?"

We all have had to face grueling decisions. The biggest decisions you might have to make are where to go to college, what jobs to accept, whether to have children, and whether to stay in your marriage or get divorced. Sometimes we have to make major health decisions—do I have them remove this lump, even though it is likely benign? Do I take this medication, when it has so many painful side effects? How involved do I get in my kids' lives? Do I follow them to that party to see if what they said is true? Do I have my parent move in with me and my family?

These decisions put us out of our comfort zone; they are hard to make. We sometimes drag our feet in making these decisions. We wish we weren't in this position. Rather than putting a

stake in the ground, we'd rather just stay in the safe zone.

I once asked my mother if I should take a new job in the next state. I fully expected her to tell me to stay where I was (safer, less commute, a known quantity). Her advice: "I'd take the job where you'd travel the world." "Why?" I asked. She responded, "Because it will challenge you. It will put you on your growing edge. It's more of a risk, and you will therefore learn more and get more out of it."

That's the upside of any tough decision—there's usually some learning you will get out of it. Conflict, or choice, can naturally lead to expansion.

There's always the easier decisions you have to make too; the ones that have fewer real consequences. My 11-year-old son recently had to decide what language to study in 7th grade. After a few days of thinking about it, he said, "I'm going to take Spanish."

"Okay," I said, glad he had at least made a decision and it wasn't going down to the wire. "Why Spanish?" I asked.

"I am going to choose Spanish, because there are more baseball players who speak Spanish." Spoken like a true 11-year-old who was in the middle of little league and striving to hit them out of the park.

So, to add to the list of how to make a decision: Ask yourself what your long-term vision is, and let that guide you. Even if you don't end up on the Yankees' bench someday, it will probably be the right decision all along. ■

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### TEAM TIP

When faced with a difficult decision, following the advice of Dr. Ben Carson, ask, "What's the best thing that can happen if I take this action, and then what's the worst thing that can happen?" Next ask, "What's the best thing that can happen if I don't do anything, and what's the worst thing that can happen if I don't do anything?"