

Here Is Why We Keep Making Bad Decisions After Bad Decisions

We cannot always eat spaghetti to forgetti our regretti.



Cover image via [Inc/Getty Images](#)

We make up to 35, 000 decisions a day without even being conscious about it

From short-term decisions like “What to wear in the morning? Which yoghurt to buy?” and the evergreen question “What to eat?” to long-term decisions like breaking up with your darling of two years, adopting a pet and buying a house, decision-making is a delicate ordeal.



Image via [Fox](#)

Remember when we were children and someone would halve a piece of cake, pie or lasagna for us to share with a sibling? And we would scrutinise both halves to see if one was larger than the other, or had more toppings than the other, and pick the best one for ourselves?

But what if one half was bigger, and the other half had more toppings?



Image originally via [Know Your Meme](#)

Now that we are all grown up, the choices are a lot trickier and the stakes are much higher.

I am the kind of person who sometimes sit and ruminate over my past decisions and wonder how my life would be had I done things differently – and more importantly, *why* I made those decisions in the first place. So I decided to try and make sense of why we tend to make the wrong choices in life.

Here are some of the things I learned:

1. When making a decision, we often rely on unreliable memory recall to make comparison between the choices that we have

Based on a TED Talk by Dan Gilbert, a Harvard psychologist, he suggests that most of our bad decision-making stem from wrongly estimating our gains and losses.

This influences our idea of improbability and leads to flaws in judgement. For example, someone asks you: Do more people die from drowning or tornado disasters?



Images via [Riverview Home Inspection](#) and [Ready](#)

Most people would say, “Tornado disasters! I always see headlines about tornadoes. Also tornadoes kill more people in an instant. It has to be tornadoes!”

...but what if I told you that the correct answer is *drowning*.



Image via [Shutterstock](#)

We tend to draw comparison based on what we *remember* – and we remember hearing more about deaths due to tornadoes than we remember hearing about deaths due to drowning simply because the former get more coverage and made interesting headlines. This phenomenon is called the [availability bias](#).

2. The estimation of values can also confuse us into making bad decisions

Gilbert explains how estimation of values is relative to the situation you are facing.



Image via [Reddit](#)

Close your eyes and imagine you are in a gas station or at the grocery store and are casually looking to buy a bottle of water. You come across a bottle of water priced at RM12.



Image via [Reddit](#)

"Is this bottled water or bottled tears from a unicorn?" you might ask. No way would you pay such an exorbitant amount for a bottle of water.

Now, imagine you are walking on a hot desert (or just walking around on a hot day in Malaysia weather) and someone sells you a bottle of water for RM12. Thirsty and dehydrated, you gladly accept and fork over the money. Exorbitant? PLEASE JUST TAKE MY MONEY.



Image via [Know Your Meme](#)

3. The estimation of odds, on the other hand, is influenced by your emotions

When you are excited, you are optimistic. Anything seems possible.



Image via [Quickmeme](#)

This may cloud your judgement into taking uncalculated risks, that end in disastrous results. Watching a friend gamble and walk away with a load of money might prompt you into doing the same. However, you forget that the odds may not always be in your favour.

Another example of bad decision making influenced by emotions is when you are anxious and make rash decisions.

Imagine you and your friend have been planning a vacation for months but have to put it on hold due to financial restrictions. Suddenly, one of you win free flight tickets. The both of you are finally, finally able to go on that vacation!

Me and my bestie planning a vacation
with a combined total of \$12.04 in our
checking accounts



Image via [Ah See It](#)

Suddenly, your friend bails out. Nervous about going alone, you decide to cancel as well and miss out on the cheap deal you got.

This ties into the “brainshift” phenomenon, coined by Dr. Robert Pearl and George York. Once something happens and induces anxiety, we completely change our perception and views of our surroundings. That vacation you were looking forward to a few months ago suddenly seem daunting.

4. There is also the issue of instant gratification vs. delayed gratification

You come across your favourite bubble tea shop and see that they are offering a 30% off from 6pm to 9pm. You glance at your watch. It's only 4pm! You stand there and ponder.



Image via [imgflip](https://imgflip.com)

After an hour of pondering, you throw your hands in the air and go “Ahhh, who cares!” and go ahead to purchase a bubble tea. If only you spent another hour pondering, you would have gotten the 30% discount.

Instant gratification is extremely motivating, but often deceptive. Delayed gratification on the other hand relies on self-control and planning ahead.

It is important to remain calm and never make decisions under pressure

Chances are you will end up self-sabotaging and in your despair, make even more less-than-fortunate decisions. Soon you will find that you have dug a deep hole for yourself.

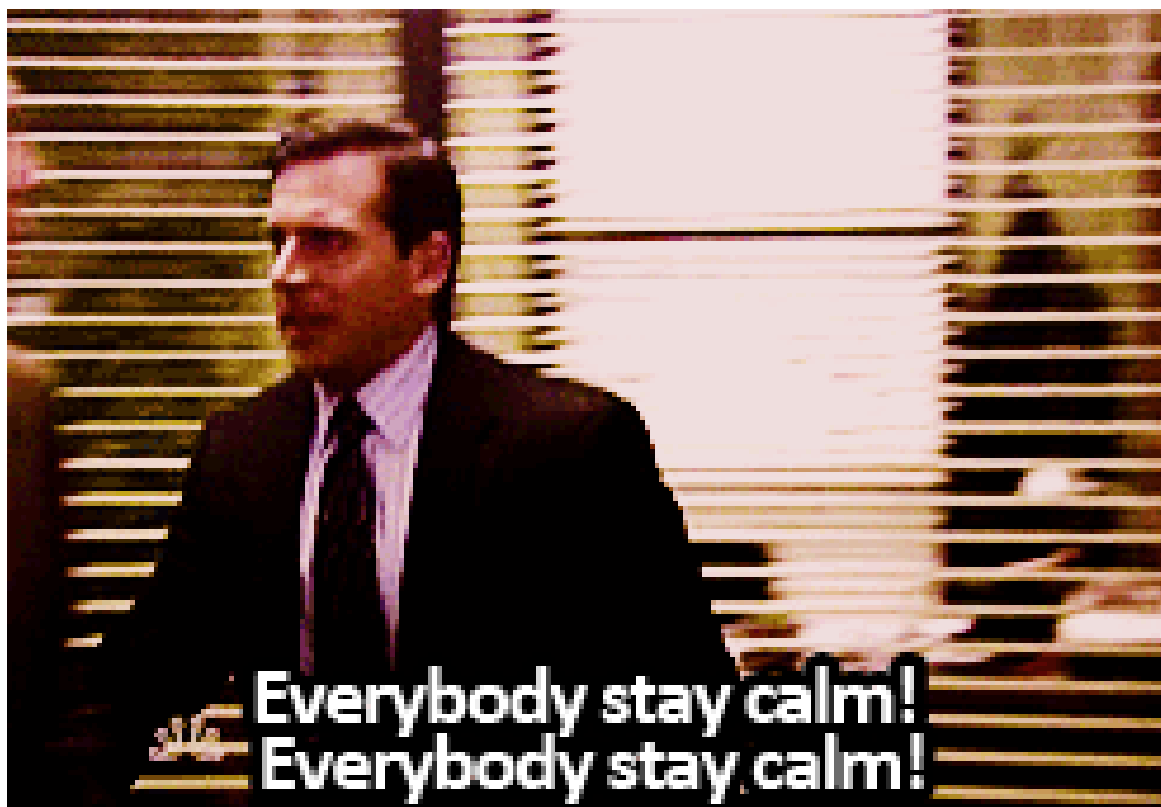


Image via [Tenor](#)

Our minds are tricksters and easily swayed by many factors. Stick to your guns, do your research and seek alternatives.

Good luck to all of us



Image via [/Film](#)