

What drives your decisions – your emotions or your mind? Find out, and find balance, so you can make smart choices.
By Glynis Horning

HEAD OR HEART? YOU DECIDE

Decisions, decisions! From cars to careers and lipsticks to lovers, few generations have faced more choices in life than today's 20-something women, or enjoyed more freedom to make them. It's exciting but also daunting, and we debate and equivocate and endlessly procrastinate, torn between our heads and our hearts.

'My mom keeps telling me how lucky I am,' says 25-year-old Durban attorney Amita*. 'I've been able to choose to go to varsity, to choose a profession I love, and now to choose a partner – my boyfriend Dinesh* and I are thinking of getting married next year.' In contrast, her mother was taken out of high school at 15 and married at 18 to a husband selected by the family. 'It was a head's-only decision – and not even Mom's head! But because of the way she was raised, she didn't question it.'

Amita believes her mother grew to love her father, 'and she always says she's been happy just raising me and my brothers, and helping in the family business.' Once, however, when Amita pressed her, she confessed that given the choice she'd have liked to study law like her daughter.

'It makes me sad but sometimes part of me is secretly almost envious,' says Amita. 'I love my life but it's so complicated making decisions, especially when they can change it completely – like now, with Dinesh. It's scary!'

PRESSURE OF CHOICE

The reason we find decisions frightening is that to choose something is by definition to reject everything else – to close the door on other possibilities. In *Predictably Irrational: The Hidden Forces That Shape Our Decisions* (Harper Collins), Dan Ariely, professor of behavioural economics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in the US, tells how in 3BC the Chinese general Xiang Yu got his reluctant troops to focus on crossing a river into enemy territory by breaking their cooking pots and burning their ships.

Conducting experiments with students at MIT, Ariely found that closing doors on options by making a decision produces in us the pain of loss. And fear of this can hold us back, stopping us from committing to a new job or to an exclusive relationship in marriage – Amita's current quandary.

'My heart tells me I love Dinesh, and my parents like him too as a person. But he's a teacher and I already outearn him. They think I could do better. And I hate myself for it, but sometimes when he and I have had a row and I look at things purely with my head, I wonder whether one day I could think so too....'

HEAD VS HEART

Most decisions come down to head versus heart. Head decisions are left-brain, says Johannesburg self-awareness coach Barbara Scogings. They're analytical and one-dimensional, centred on conscious, logical, rational thinking. ▶

GUIDE TO DECIDE

TO MAKE A GOOD DECISION:

- 1** Be clear about the problem you're solving, says the Decision Education Foundation in the US (www.decisioneducation.org).
- 2** Be clear about what you want.
- 3** Explore alternatives, being creative and realistic.
- 4** Use the best information you can gather.
- 5** Reason soundly, weighing pros, cons and potential consequences, and select the best alternative in the light of the information you've gathered and your values.
- 6** If you're mostly a head person, consciously step into heart space, and vice versa, says transformation coach and author Steve Wright Krumbeck of The (W)Right Coaching Company in Johannesburg. Does your decision make sense and feel right?
- 7** Follow through. Have the means (in your head) and will (in your heart) to carry out your decision.
- 8** Understand that, as the Foundation says, 'Good decisions won't guarantee good outcomes but, on average, consistently better decisions lead to consistently better outcomes.'

We come to them by objectively considering the pros and cons of different options, assigning values and weights to each, and considering best- and worst-case scenarios and the probabilities of these.

Heart decisions, on the other hand, are right-brain. They're emotional; rooted in our feelings and intuition. We arrive at them by listening to our inner voice, visualising different options and their implications, noticing the feelings associated with each, sometimes even considering our dreams, looking to our subconscious for guidance.

'Which of the two drives you most will impact greatly on your life from your early 20s until you retire,' says transformation coach and author Steve Wright Krummeck of The (W)Right Coaching Company in Johannesburg (www.twrcc.co.za).

Basic personality type will play a role. People driven predominantly by the heart are 'feelers, life's lovers', says Anthony Falikowski, author of *Mastering Human Relations* (Pearson). They tend to be intuitive, unconventional, exploratory, sociable, compassionate and humane. In contrast, head people, who he calls 'life's logicians', mostly need time to plan and consider, like to organise and synthesise information, prefer to learn vicariously through books, store large amounts of knowledge and information, and are interested in ideas and theories.

Culture, upbringing and the values these instil in us also influence how we make decisions, as do evolutionary forces and the way our brains are biologically wired. Today developments in magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) techniques allow scientists to see exactly what goes on in the brain during decision-making. By measuring levels of oxygen in the blood they can tell which areas of the brain are more active – those dealing with abstract reasoning or those processing emotions. Harvard psychology professor Joshua Greene has used MRI to demonstrate that there is a neurological basis for us being 'in two minds' over decisions – that our 'heart' and our 'head' compete for dominance.

DECIDING RIGHT

'Good decision-making is a learnt skill and must be exercised like a muscle to build strength,' say leadership coaches Annette Geffert and Diane Brown, authors of *A Toolbox For Our Daughters* (New World Library). Positive growth and change require the development of what they

'GOOD DECISION-MAKING IS A LEARNT SKILL AND MUST BE EXERCISED LIKE A MUSCLE TO BUILD STRENGTH'

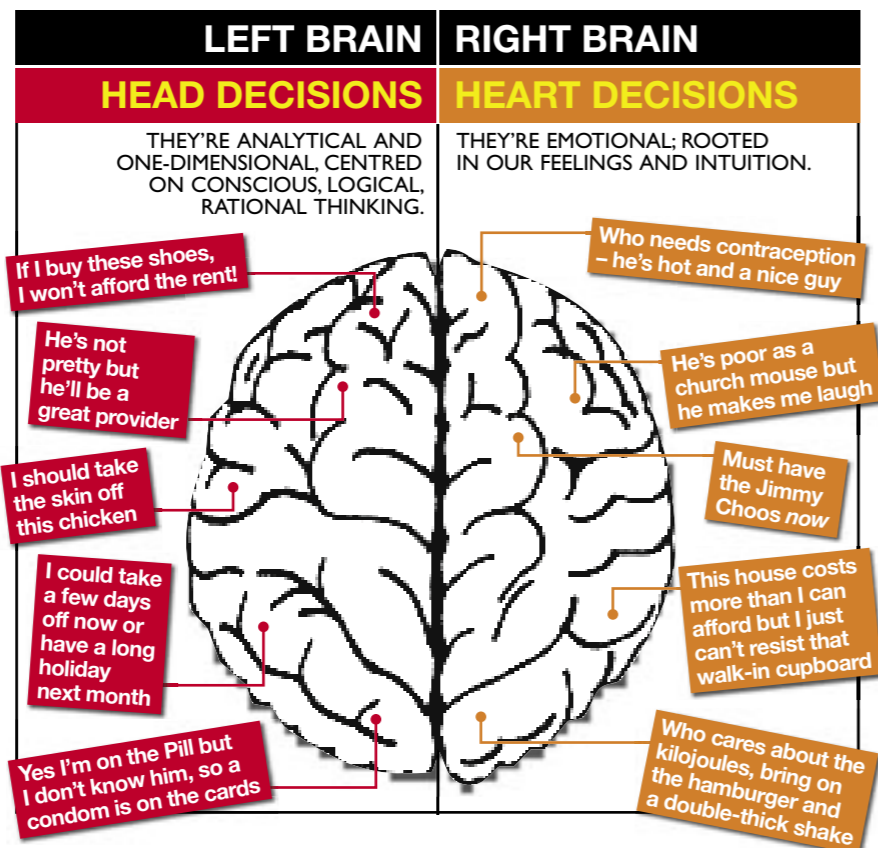
call our 'internal decision-making centre' or 'connected inner guide'. Unchecked, the head and the heart have no desire for balance – each pushes hard for control, and when one is allowed to dominate it's at the expense of the other. But both are needed for us to function 'in harmony and balance'.

From our late teens through our 20s, our behaviour tends to be more heart-driven, says Scogings. 'In ancient tradition, the heart is the seat of authentic

intelligence and it's important to listen to it. But because you're still emotionally immature, your heart-felt actions will often be impulsive and need to be tempered with reason until you can use the two more equally, usually around age 30. Permanent contentment will grow out of a balance between heartfelt and logical choices.'

Krummeck agrees. 'We need to acknowledge whether we are predominantly heart- or head-driven, then consciously step into the opposite space for a while when we make decisions. If that's too hard we need to seek mediation or advice from a trusted friend who operates in that opposite space and can play devil's advocate, or from a coach or counsellor.'

Recent research at the University of Amsterdam shows that most people use a head approach for deciding simpler, more practical things, such as whether to buy a toaster, considering features such as price, brand and quality. But when it comes to more important decisions, for instance whether to buy a house or get married, they're mostly swayed by the heart. And this may well be for the best – in recent tests at the



University of Otago in New Zealand, psychologist Dr Jamin Halberstadt demonstrated that intuitive or 'heart' decision-making often leads to more accurate or better-quality decisions than an analytic head approach. 'Analysing reasons can impair judgment,' he reported.

So what's our best approach? 'Weigh things up logically,' advises Krummeck. (See 'Guide to decide'.) 'Then go with your heart! Client after client tells me "If only I'd followed my heart early in life." It's estimated 65% to 70% of people in the world are happy. The rest are mostly unhappy because they didn't listen to their hearts and pursued security and money instead of what excited them. They listened to their heads. This has a profound effect throughout our lives.'

When we pursue our passion, says Krummeck, we tend to be more joyful. This brings about a physiological change

in our bodies – our heartbeat actually becomes more regular, stress levels drop and we're more at peace. 'Heart decisions tend to be "love-driven", positive and energising, while head ones can be fear-driven, negative and debilitating.' The way you feel after making a decision will indicate whether it's right for you. If you're tense and stressed, rethink it. If you're relaxed and content, it's almost certainly the right decision for you, at least for now.

'Don't look for perfection,' concludes Krummeck. This is an imperfect universe. Remember: avoiding making a decision is to make a decision by default – often one that puts your life on hold. 'Be glad you have the power to choose, choose as well as you can, and follow through on the choice. Learn whatever you can from it. You will grow in the process!' □

* NAME HAS BEEN CHANGED

HOW ACHIEVERS CHOOSE

HEAD:	HEART:
 <p>NATALIE BECKER, 35, radio and TV presenter, and actress currently on screen in <i>The World Unseen</i>: 'It's easy for me to be detached and follow my head when making decisions, and there are times I've regretted not trusting my intuition. This has prompted me to look to create balance now – and that's how we learn!'</p>	 <p>ZUKI VUTELA, 31, poet and Poetry Africa project manager at the Centre for Creative Arts at the University of KwaZulu-Natal: 'My passion and intuition have led me to make some very unpopular decisions and remarks, and I've had to endure dirty looks, but I've invariably been congratulated once the results come in. To my disappointment, though, while this works out in the work world, when it comes to personal relationships my heart has definitely let me down – I know I should start using my head for those!'</p>
 <p>NOTHANDO NDEBELE, 34, chartered accountant, financial analyst, and research head and partner at Renaissance Specialist Fund Managers in Cape Town: 'Clients pay me to make rational, well-thought-out investment decisions on their behalf. However, I've come to see the value of thinking more with my heart in my personal life. I regret letting go a relationship some years ago because it didn't make sense to me, given that in the long term we wanted to live on different continents. But as I look back, I realise that relationship was the best thing that's ever happened to me. Had I used my heart, I may have made a different decision.'</p>	 <p>JACKIE CAMERON, 24, award-winning chef at Hartford House in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands: 'I think most people know in their hearts what the right thing to do is – it's more a question of having enough heart to actually do it! If something fits with my philosophy and my heart, I give it the thumbs up. In the creative industry in particular it's imperative to allow your passion and personality to come through.'</p>

PHOTOGRAPHY XXXXXXXXX

QUIZ

- Which words fit you best?**
 - (a) Logical, analytical, objective
 - (b) Energetic, driven, decisive
 - (c) Caring, helpful, supportive
 - (d) Thoughtful, sensitive, complex
- How would you choose between two new homes?**
 - (a) List your ideal features and see which home has most
 - (b) Compare the pros and cons of each
 - (c) Trust your gut
 - (d) Consider the wishes of others in your life
- How would you answer if a friend dated someone you disliked and asked for your views on the relationship?**
 - (a) Give a direct, honest opinion
 - (b) Share your views truthfully but tactfully
 - (c) Try not to hurt his/her feelings, changing the topic if necessary
 - (d) Do everything possible to protect his/her feelings – even telling a white lie

- A group of friends starts arguing. What do you do?**
 - (a) Tackle the argument head-on
 - (b) Try to find an answer to the problem
 - (c) Try to meet everyone's needs
 - (d) Do anything to achieve peace and make everyone happy

- When you make a difficult decision, what's most important to you?**
 - (a) Arriving at the best choice logically
 - (b) Being fair
 - (c) Doing the right thing according to your own values and beliefs
 - (d) Getting others to agree and approve

If you marked more As and Bs, you're a predominantly 'head' person. More Cs and Ds make you mostly a 'heart' person. (Adapted from a personality test available at www.bbc.co.uk/science.)

SELF-HELP BOOKS

