



Your Life is Your Choice

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I've just been reading, in the New York Times, the full transcript of Tiger Woods' statement at his recent press conference in Florida on the occasion of his public reappearance. In amongst the text, he talks of the therapy that he received during his absence from the public eye and that, although he has taken his "first steps in the right direction", he still has a "long way to go". Working with my clients over the last fourteen years, these are not unfamiliar sentiments to me – it is part of the adult human condition to lose direction and taking steps in the right direction is an integral part of every life's journey.

These things are an integral part of the human condition because of what some call "free will" – but let's keep it simple and settle on the word "choice". We are where we are in our lives today because of the various choices that we have made along the way. We can clearly recollect major choices that have taken our lives in a particular direction or, indeed, choices we should not have made that lead to the kind of situation in which Tiger Woods found himself. But what we're not aware of is that we make choices all of the time – moment to moment. The most important choices that we make in life relate to our thoughts because, regardless of what you might believe, you choose which thoughts you will pay attention to moment to moment. If you find yourself obsessed by thoughts that you inherently know are bad for you – the most common thought that falls into this category is worry – it's not the thoughts' fault, thoughts don't have a mind of their own, it's you who is paying attention to those thoughts, it is you who have chosen to pay attention to those thoughts.

Unfortunately, lack of mental discipline on the part of the normal adult leads us into a half-life where we somehow abdicate responsibility for our choices. Sure, like Tiger Woods, our choices may come back to haunt us in a very public way. But, for most of us, the little choices that lead to lives that are "not too bad", where nothing great ever happens, where we never achieve the abundance or effortless success that you only read about in self-help books, these little choices seem to just happen. For example, you find yourself accepting a second cigarette outside the bar, when you already thought that you could have done without the first one. For example, you decide that you're going to get your head in shape by meditating but find that, in twenty-four hours, you haven't been able to find five minutes to do it – events overtook you in the same way that Tiger Woods said that, when he felt that he "deserved to enjoy all the temptations" around him, he "didn't have far to go"

to find them. Events don't overtake you, choices don't just happen. We reach crossroads in our lives every moment of every day – at each crossroads we have a choice and we normally take either the easiest direction or the one that everyone else is taking – normally, they're one and the same.

Our problem, as normal adults, is that we are normally not aware that we have choices to make. We really do believe ourselves to be the victim of circumstance or that our misdemeanours are something that we slipped into, almost without being able to make a choice. It's our lack of awareness, moment to moment, that disables our ability to know the difference between what's good for us and what's not. Not our lack of awareness of big choices – it's the little ones that get under our skin so that we get into the habit of making mindless choices in little things so that, having made the wrong choice at a load of small crossroads, we find ourselves half way down a route to self-destruction and we almost wonder how we got there. We took ourselves on that journey – mindlessly.

You may not think the choices that have got you to where you are are all that bad – you may be relatively happy with your life. You may find that, like the vast majority of normal people, life's not so bad. Well, not so bad is not good enough – when compared to the wonderful, effortless, successful, abundant life that you can have – minus the press conferences, of course. If you're meandering through life thinking that you're doing OK, you are seriously short-changing yourself, you are seriously missing out on life's opportunities, they're there, they're passing you by but, you're actually choosing not to notice them and you don't even realize it.

OK, so you may not end up at a big crossroads like Tiger Woods – but stop, reflect, look at yourself, your life, your work, your family, your work life balance. If you haven't "got it all" (whatever "it all" means to you) it's because of the choices that you have made and are making at this moment in time. Once again, don't get me wrong, I'm not talking about life's big choices, I'm talking about choosing to channel-hop instead of doing something more productive, choosing to eat that extra donut and forget the gym, choosing to gossip at the water cooler instead of making that all important 'phone call that you've been putting off. Fill in your own blanks, our lives are full of choices and, as a result, opportunities taken and missed. Take your first steps in the right direction today, start choosing the thoughts and state of mind that will lead you to a better place.