Decisions, Decisions

Though we are taught from an early age what is right and what is wrong, no amount of preparation can completely prepare teens to make good decisions when they are put in a challenging position. Not only is it in their nature to rebel at one point or another, but, quite literally, they are mentally handicapped. However, even with these limitations, there is still hope. With a strong, clear decision making process, teens may make better choices. The process is quite simple, with only four steps: analyzing strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. This process is often called SWOT model for short. The side by side comparison used in the SWOT model is much more involved than a simple pros and cons list, and the benefits are much greater in the long run.

The first step in this decision making process is for one to evaluate the strengths in making a decision. This allows one to know who the decision will affect, including themselves, and what they could gain intellectually and emotionally from making a decision. In Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet, Juliet stops for a moment to consider the strengths in her decision to marry Romeo. “Tis but thy name that is my enemy; thou art thyself, though not a Montague (2.2.37).” Juliet realizes that she and Romeo are not enemies, but that their names are enemies. If they marry, their parents could potentially make peace with each other. Less people would be killed in the streets of Verona. This would affect not only both families in a positive light, but the entire city as well.

After assessing the strengths of making a decision, focus on the weaknesses. This is the second step used in the model. Knowing the weaknesses in making a decision lets one know who it could negatively affect and how. Juliet also briefly considers the weaknesses in her decision to secretly see and marry Romeo. “If they see you, they’ll kill you (2.2.89).” Knowing that her family could hurt Romeo makes her a little more hesitant about sneaking around with him.

The third step used in the SWOT model is identifying any potential opportunities and assessing them. This lets one know if the risk is worth it. Will more be gained than lost? In Romeo and Juliet, the thing Romeo and Juliet both want to gain is the opportunity to be free from their parents’ hatred. Friar Lawrence says, “Hold, get you gone. Be strong and prosperous. In this resolve (4.1.23).” He is wishing the couple good luck with their decision because he wants them both to be free to be with the one they love, which happens to be each other. To both Romeo and Juliet, this opportunity outweighs any of the threats that they face.

After analyzing the opportunities, finally turn the attention to the threats. Knowing the threats will identify who the decision could hurt and if the decision is worth it overall. When Romeo makes the decision to kill Tybalt instinctively, he is faced with the threat of being put to death by the prince. “Ha! Banishment! Be more merciful, say “death”. For exile hath more terror in his look, much more than death. Do not say banishment (3.3.13).” Instead of being sent to death, Romeo is banished from the city, something that’s even worse to him because he can’t be with Juliet. He realizes what a mistake it was to kill Tybalt because he must face consequences.

Some teens may argue that they don’t need to use the SWOT model to make decisions. Some may argue that they make mature decisions, but scientific evidence proves otherwise. Teens’ brains are not yet fully developed. According to the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, the amygdala part of the brain, which controls instinctual reactions, develops at an early age. Meanwhile, the frontal cortex, which controls reasoning, develops later on in life. This can cause teens to rely mostly on their amygdala and emotions to make decisions, usually causing them to be bad ones.

With a clearly defined decision making process, focusing on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of a decision can help teens make better decisions. All they have to do is take a few minutes to think.

Works Cited

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