

You Can't Fight Them All: Choose Your Battles Wisely

Sue Riggs, WVU Extension Agent, Marshall County

“Any fool can criticize, complain, condemn, and most fools do. Picking your battles is impressive and fighting them fairly is essential.”

—Dale Carnegie

Marta Driesslein, career strategist, says “I share with my clients that they should strategically choose the battles that are worth the wounds. Most are not. The battles that should be fought should never be about us or posturing, or retribution for something, or someone that wronged us. Unfortunately, most are.”

Objectives:

- To learn the criteria for choosing life's battles that will make a positive difference in our lives.
- To sharpen one's decision-making skills.
- To explore techniques to adopt a spirit of acceptance to get along.

Criteria for choosing battles wisely

Each of us is given 24 hours a day and 168 hours a week. We all need to learn how to use those hours effectively to do the things that are important to us. We each have many demands on our time. The way we use our time depends on our priorities. We need to learn effective time management strategies to learn how to discipline and control ourselves.

“Choose your battles wisely” is a phrase often used in teaching positive parenting skills, but it applies equally well to living a satisfying life. Dr. Richard Carlson, author of a series of best-selling books, has a chapter entitled “Choose Your Battles Wisely” in his first book *Don't Sweat the Small Stuff . . . and It's All Small Stuff*. He notes that life is filled with opportunities to choose between making a big deal out of something or simply letting it go, realizing that it doesn't matter. He further points out that you'll be far more effective in winning those battles that are truly important if you choose your battles wisely.

When you fight or argue over every confrontation, people will perceive you as a confrontational troublemaker. If you challenge only those issues that are truly and personally offensive to you, your opinions and disagreement will bear more weight, and people will listen. You will also be keeping track of what is truly relevant to you.

Carlson points out that life is rarely exactly the way we want it to be, and often other people don't act the way we would like. Every day, we have aspects of life we like and

others we don't. There will always be people who don't agree with you, people who do things differently. If you always fight for your perfect world, you'll spend most of your life fighting battles.

Carlson relates that a peaceful way to live is to decide consciously which battles are worth fighting and which are better left alone. Ideally, each of us would like to live a positive, tranquil, relatively stress-free life. To do this, we need to let go of matters that are not worthy of arguing over, those that are not our business, and those that we cannot do anything about.

Reserve your battles for truly important issues. You may want to fight for justice when someone has been harassed, abused, or slandered. You may want to fight for an issue that will make your community a better place to live. You may want to fight for a new law that is more just.

Carlson points out that many of us may need to reevaluate our priorities. It's critical that we choose our battles wisely, and then perhaps there will come a day when we will rarely need to battle at all.



Sharpen your decision-making skills

An article by Liraz Publishing Company offers some good tips on making decisions. The article points out that “just as people are different, so are their styles of decision-making. Each person is a result of all the decisions made in their life to date.” Recognizing this, the article offers the following suggestions to enhance one’s decision-making batting average.

- Only make decisions that are yours to make.
- Realize that when you make a decision, you are not making a choice between right and wrong; but you are only choosing from the alternatives.
- Avoid snap decisions, especially those that cannot be reversed.
- Make decisions while you still have time. Choosing the right alternative at the wrong time is not any better than the wrong alternative at the right time.
- Make mental or written notes on all the pros and cons of any decision. This will help you make the best decision.



- Make decisions based on what is right, not who is right.
- Consider those affected by your decision. If possible, get them involved to get their commitment.
- Recognize that you cannot be 100 percent certain that your decision is correct, because the actions to implement that decision will take place in the future.

- Use the **OAR** approach in decision-making. Look at the **O**bjectives you are seeking to obtain, the **A**lternatives you feel are available, and the **R**isk of the alternatives you are considering.
- Realize that decisions should be made close to the scene of the action by those involved.
- Remember that to choose not to make a decision is a decision not to take action.
- Understand that to be effective, a decision-maker must have the luxury of having the right to be wrong.
- Trust yourself to make the best decision on a matter and then to be able to field the consequences appropriately.
- Don’t waste your time on making decisions that don’t have to be made.
- Determine alternative courses of action before gathering data on a decision to be made.



- Before implementing what appears to be the best decision, assess the risk by asking, “What can I think of that might go wrong with this choice?”
- Understand that about 80 percent of the decisions we make are unimportant. Let others share in making some of these unimportant decisions. They too will have a feeling of accomplishment.
- When you are a member of a group, consider that when you make a decision on behalf of the group, other group members probably will have less commitment to the decision than if they had helped make it.
- Realize that part of the decision-making process is to decide how the decision will be implemented.
- As soon as you are aware that a decision will have to be made on a specific situation, review the facts and store them in your subconscious mind until it is time to make a final decision.
- Once you have made a decision to the best of your ability, never look back. Be aware of how it is currently affecting you and focus on your next move. Never regret a decision. It was the right thing to do at that time. Next, focus on what is right at this time.
- Mentally rehearse the implementation of your choice and mentally reflect what the outcome will be.
- Brainstorm alternative solutions with individuals whose judgment you trust.
- At a proper time, discontinue prolonged deliberation about your decision. Make it and carry it through.
- Once a decision has been made, put aside “what if’s” and do it with commitment.



Adopt a spirit of acceptance

Dr. Phil McGraw, author of the *New York Times*'s No.1 best-seller *Life Strategies* and host of the famous Dr. Phil television program, says, "Some battles are none of your business. Some battles you can never win so why try? We all need to adopt a spirit of acceptance to get along. Even though the decision may not be what you want, your acceptance of that decision is a way to have peace. You can pull someone toward your own ideals, but eventually they will pull back to their own instincts. Therefore, have a spirit of acceptance when people's ideals are different from yours."

If you need to make a change in your life, Dr. Joy Browne, a licensed clinical psychologist and host of her own daily syndicated radio show based in New York City, has written a book *Getting Unstuck: 8 Simple Steps to Solving Any Problem*. She outlines some important areas for consideration if you want to learn techniques to help you find ways to enjoy life more.

Step 1: Focus on the present. Living in the past keeps you fixated on what was done to you rather than on what you can do. Put your energy into current problem-solving.

Step 2: Play it forward. You can't tell the future, but you can imagine the consequences of your actions. Thinking things through makes it easier to make serious decisions.

Step 3: Be your neighbor or friend. Think about what advice you would offer if a situation happened to someone else. You may be able to think more clearly when you consider advice for another person.

Step 4: Be specific. Communications is always a problem in understanding. Let others know what you really expect. In a kind way, don't beat around the bush when you want someone to understand how you feel.

Step 5: Do what works. Use your strengths. Employ techniques that you know work for you. Use your talents to make the best decision.



Step 6:

Examine your assumptions.

Be aware of negative ones and change them. What we believe about others determines how we treat them and how they react to us.

Step 7: Live every day as if it were your last.

This helps you focus on what's important.

Step 8: Think about what you would like inscribed on your tombstone.

When choosing among courses of action, ask yourself, "Will this make me worthy of my epitaph?"

Take time to carefully and wisely choose which battles you will get involved in and which battles are best to let go. Ask yourself, will this make a difference in the long run, will this cause me undue stress, and is this really any of my business? Choosing battles wisely requires patience and making wise choices. When relationships are full of care and kindness, our conflicts will be careful and rare.

Follow-up activities

- Choose a situation and determine if it is a battle to be fought (and why). If so, what are the alternatives, pro and con? Then make a decision and consider the consequences.
- Make a list of "small stuff" battles people fight over (e.g., "Who put the scratch on the car?"). Then make a list of worthy battles.

Resources

- Browne, Joy. *Getting Unstuck: 8 Simple Steps to Solving Any Problem*, 2002, Hay House, Inc., Calif.
- Carlson, Richard, *Don't Sweat the Small Stuff... and It's All Small Stuff*, 1997, Hyperion Press, N.Y.
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- McGraw, Phillip, C. *Life Strategies*, 2000, Hyperion Press, N.Y.

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