

Ep #5: Making Decisions Ahead of Time



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With Your Host

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Ep #5: Making Decisions Ahead of Time

You're listening to *The Less Stressed Lawyer* Podcast, episode 5. We're talking all about making decisions ahead of time. You ready? Let's go.

Welcome to *The Less Stressed Lawyer*, the only podcast that teaches you how to manage your mind so you can live a life with less stress and far more fulfillment. If you're a lawyer who's over the overwhelm and tired of trying to hustle your way to happiness, you're in the right place. Now, here's your host, lawyer turned life coach, Olivia Vizachero.

Hello, my friends. What's going on with you? I hope you're having a great week. This is my last week in Detroit before I head to Texas for an event that's being hosted by coaching school, The Life Coach School. And I'll actually be there in Austin when this episode is released, so if that's when you're hearing this, greetings from Austin.

Anyways, enough about my travel escapades, let's dive in to today's topic. I'm actually talking about one of my absolute favorite topics today and it's something that I bring up in my coaching sessions with my clients all the time. My clients are actually sick of hearing me say this phrase, I say it so often. But we're talking today about making decisions ahead of time.

What does that even mean? All right, let's dive in. Making decisions ahead of time is where you make a decision ahead of time once and for all, and you don't revisit the decision. Every time you encounter the scenario or the fact pattern to which the decision applies, you simply follow your original decision and implement the predetermined course of action that you've decided upon, okay?

So you make a decision one time, every time it comes up you follow that decision, you stick to the plan. That's the long and short of it. Now, here's some science behind why it makes sense to make decisions ahead of time.

And a quick side note here, if you're wondering about what is the other option? Making decisions ahead of time versus what? The other alternative

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is making decisions in the spur of the moment. That split second decision that's happening in real time, right? So you're either making decisions ahead of time or you're making decisions in the moment.

Here's why it makes sense to make decisions ahead of time, we actually utilize different parts of our brains depending on which type of decision we're making. When we're making decisions in the moment, we're using the primitive part of our brain.

And this is the instinctive part of our brain that is responsible for basic functioning; breathing, blinking, flinching, all that stuff. It's also in control of our innate and automatic self-preserving behavior patterns that help ensure our survival, keep us safe and ultimately make sure that we don't die.

I mentioned this in the last episode, that the primitive part of our brain is always trying to do three things; seek pleasure, avoid discomfort, and conserve energy. And it's doing that as part of that natural instinctive self-preservation process. So when we're making in the moment decisions, they're very rarely aligned with achieving our long-term goals. They're focused on those short-term incentives instead, okay?

Now, when we make decisions ahead of time, we use our prefrontal cortex to make those decisions. And that's the part of the brain that is responsible for reasoning, problem solving, comprehension, impulse control, creativity and perseverance, all right?

When we make decisions ahead of time, we've temporally removed ourselves from the point that we would be required to take action, that the discomfort associated with taking action that would arise in the moment that we're due to take it, that discomfort is far enough removed, it's a distant enough threat that we don't make the decision based on having an eye towards avoiding that discomfort.

We're not focused on seeking pleasure, avoiding pain, and conserving energy. That self-preservation instinct doesn't kick in because the discomfort threat is far enough removed. And that means when we're

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making decisions ahead of time we aren't reactive, we're really proactive and intentional. We're able to make the decision from a grounded mental space. And again, that's because the decision is being removed the in the moment action taking when the discomfort avoidance is at its highest.

From that grounded place we're able to make the most logical decision that is best aligned with achieving our long-term objectives. Now, why is this helpful? First, you make decisions that support your long-term growth and set you up for success. You also eliminate or substantially reduce the amount of decision fatigue that you experience. And if you're not super familiar with decision fatigue, I'm going to explain that right now.

I want you to think of your brain as a battery. Every decision that you make depletes it little by little throughout the day. And you waste that resource, that battery energy, that battery life, making repetitive decisions when you could be using it on your best work, on the problems that are really complex that you need to tackle, right?

Think about how many decisions you make on a daily basis. Most of the decisions you're making, you don't even realize that you're making them in the moment, but you are in fact making them. I actually just did a quick Google search just to see what the estimated number of daily decisions would be, and even I'm shocked. I figured the number would be high, but I'm pretty stunned.

The answer, and it's Google so take that for what you will. But the answer that came back when I did the search was that the average person makes 35,000 decisions a day. Think of all of the mental energy that is required to make that many decisions. Think of that battery in your brain, think about how quickly it gets depleted when you're making that many decisions.

You wake up, what time are you waking up? What time are you getting out of bed? Are you hitting snooze? What are you doing the first thing you get up? Are you getting a drink of water? Are you going to jump straight in the shower? Are you going to check your phone first? All the decisions that come with checking your phone. What are you going to wear today?

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There's several decisions there, right? What are you going to eat? That tends to be everyone's least favorite decision throughout the day.

So many decisions, when are you going to respond to that email? What are you going to say? What's the word choice going to be? How long should the email be? Should you respond now? Should you respond later?

Decision after decision after decision after decision. When are you going to check your email? Should you check it again? Has it been too long? How long are you going to work for the day? What time are you going to stop working? Will you take breaks? Will you not?

What are you going to do after work? What are you going to eat for dinner? Are you going to watch TV? If so what are you going to watch? What time are you going to go to bed? That's just a smattering of the decisions you make on a daily basis, right?

Making all of those decisions utilizes mental energy. And it takes more energy to make in the moment decisions because you're essentially deciding anew each time. You keep revisiting it and it's not like you're bringing all of the history with you. It might seem like you are, but you're re-deciding anew every time you make the decision in the moment.

You can save energy by making the decision once, a single time ahead of time and following that plan every time you encounter the fact pattern or situation to which that decision applies. And the energy that you save, you get to apply it to doing your most important work instead of the monotonous stuff that really doesn't require that brainpower, that heavy lifting, okay?

You also get to get to the end of your day feeling more energized because you haven't made all of these unnecessary mental energy expenditures on in the moment decision making. And that's really what not making decisions ahead of time leads to. It leads to you going into everyday situations undecided, your mind isn't made up.

So one of the problems with being undecided and making decisions in the moment is that it wastes your time. And, man, time is one of your most

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valuable assets that you have. It's one of your most valuable resources so we don't want to be wasting it.

Now, why is it a waste of time? Because if we're being really honest, most people don't make empowered decisions confidently and quickly. That's something that I teach my clients to do, but most people don't do that inherently on their own, okay?

Instead of making empowered decisions confidently and quickly, people spin in indecision, they hem and they haw, they second guess themselves, which is really just another way of indulging in an action. But they take a ton of time to make a decision, to get to the point where they're actually decided. So being undecided is a huge waste of time.

Now, you want to become a person who is decided because it gets you results that you want in your life so much faster. Actually, being decided is one of my themes for the year because I know that by being decided, I'll be able to achieve some of my desired results that I have for myself and my business so much faster.

So I really want you to start thinking of being a person who is decided. And you achieve that by making decisions ahead of time that that's something that really buys you back your time and makes sure that you're making the most efficient use of the time that you have.

Now, quick side note here, this doesn't mean that you can't ever change your mind. I'm going to talk about this a little bit more towards the end of this episode, but you can change your mind, you just want to be doing that very intentionally.

Not in the way that comes from spinning in indecision and second guessing yourself and saying you decided but then going back on the decision and then spinning some more, okay? Not like that, We want to make really intentional changes to decisions that support the results we're trying to create. I'll talk more about that later.

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Another problem with making decisions in the moment is that you make your life harder. And none of us want to do that, right? You over complicate your life. You essentially inconvenience yourself when you resort to in the moment decision making. And listen, you don't need to add insult to injury here by making your life harder than it needs to be. Most of my clients come to me already believing that their lives are hard enough.

So you want to avoid making as many in the moment decisions as you possibly can in order to simplify your life, make it less complicated, make it much more convenient, make it easier. Who doesn't want things to be a little easier, right?

Okay, now that I've explained what making decisions ahead of time is and why it's better than making decisions in the moment, I want to go through several examples of decisions that you can make ahead of time. And I want to do this, and I mentioned this in that last episode, because that's how you're really going to begin to learn, understand, and internalize these concepts, through lots and lots of examples.

A lot of these decisions that I'm going to share with you are decisions that I've actually implemented in my own life to simplify my life, make things more convenient, save myself time. Other decisions that I'm going to introduce you to through these examples are some decisions that my clients have actually implemented. And I think they're great, so I want to offer them to you as inspiration.

The first one I want to start with is one of the ones that I've had in place the longest, but it's a decision that I've made ahead of time about where I put my car keys. I put them in the exact same spot every single time I come back into my house after I've used my car. And I never ever waver from this.

They go in a particular drawer, I put them there as soon as I enter my house, even when I have the urge to just set them on the coffee table and put them in the drawer later. I remind myself in that moment, we've already

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decided this, we've made a decision ahead of time. Go put your car keys in the drawer. And then I go do it.

And how does this make my life more convenient? I'm never scrambling to find my keys. This is a super simple decision ahead of time, but it really does make my life easier. I'm never late because I can't find my car keys. I always know where they are. I don't have to dig for them in my purse. I don't have to look for them in a sofa cushion or underneath my couch or anything like that. I always know exactly where they're at.

Another decision ahead of time that I've made is the decision to plug my cell phone in every night before I go to bed to charge. If you're a friend of mine, you know that my cell phone used to be perpetually dead. And it's super inconvenient, right?

I used to have to worry about bringing a charger with me if I would go out for the night because my phone probably wouldn't be charged. If you're trying to get ahold of someone and your phone dies, that's super inconvenient. It just added extra tension and stress to my life. And that extra stress and complication, totally unnecessary.

So I problem solved, I figured out what would make my life easier. And that is to, first and foremost, buy a long enough charger so I could plug my phone in and be in bed with my phone every night, that was one of the reasons that I wasn't charging it in the evenings to begin with. So I bought a longer charger and now I charge it every single night. I am not allowed to fall asleep until my phone is plugged in. I honor that decision every night when I go to bed.

Another decision ahead of time that I've made is regarding my calendar. I use an electronic scheduler to schedule a lot of my calls because I absolutely hate the back and forth of figuring out when people are free to schedule a call. That's actually another decision ahead of time that I've made, that I don't do the back and forth, I only use my electronic scheduler, I use Calendly.

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So because I have Calendly, people have access to my calendar. And if my calendar is not always up to date it's really easy for me to end up becoming double booked, which I absolutely want to avoid. I don't like, again, the unnecessary communication of having to resolve a conflict that was completely avoidable.

So I have a rule, as soon as the need for a calendar event arises, I have to create it. I create the calendar event immediately, all of my time is up to date and blocked off and it eliminates all conflicts, which is absolutely life changing and such a headache saver.

Here are a couple other examples, when it comes to scheduling calls I have a rule I never scheduled back-to-back calls. Making this decision ahead of time makes sure that I don't end up running late for one thing because another thing ran long. And I don't have to deal with the stress at the end of a meeting if something seems to be running over. So when the opportunity to schedule something back-to-back arises, I remember I have made the decision ahead of time and that's simply a no for me.

Here are a couple other decisions you can make ahead of time that relate to your calendar and how you spend your time. Any standing meetings that would make sense for you have throughout the week, pick the same day and time and just have them as recurring appointments on your calendar instead of scrambling last minute to try and find a time that works for everyone.

People will be able to plan ahead, it saves the back-and-forth time of the scheduling. And it also allows you to make the most efficient use of that meeting time because everyone was able to prepare for it.

You can also make a decision ahead of time about when you start work and when you end work for the day. If you want to start work every day at nine, then you make that decision and you honor it. You get out of the drama of having to figure out do I start at 9? Am I starting at 8:30? Well, maybe 9:30 is okay. You will eliminate all of that decision fatigue and indecision by just deciding the time you start work and honoring it.

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You can make a decision ahead of time about when you enter your billable time if you're someone who has to do that as part of their job. You can make a decision ahead of time about when you check social media. If you're a procrastinator and you tend to check it throughout the day and it really messes with your productivity and puts you behind when it comes to your schedule, you can make a decision ahead of time about when you check social media throughout the day.

You can also do this with email rather than being in your inbox all day long, for lack of a better term half pregnant between the work that you're working on and your inbox. You can decide ahead of time the times of the day when you check email and you just honor that. If it's not in one of those times, you wait until one of the times to check it.

Making this decision ahead of time makes you so much more focused and efficient when it comes to your work because you don't waste time reorienting yourself between your inbox and the more substantive task at hand, okay? So that's a really big game changer if you choose to make that decision ahead of time and implement it.

You can actually make scheduling decisions about when you do anything. Everyone's least favorite decisions tend to be around food, so you can make decisions ahead of time about when you eat, where you eat, and what you eat.

So think, what decisions can you make ahead of time to simplify the food category for yourself? I've made a ton there, especially about what I eat during the week nights in order to make my life a lot easier because I noticed I was wasting a ton of time making decisions around food.

I also make decisions about when I order groceries and go grocery shopping. That's a weekend activity for me and I normally go to the market on Friday nights because I like to prepare a fresh dinner on Friday. And I make sure my groceries are ordered and delivered on Sundays so I have things for the week.

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You can make decisions ahead of time about what time you go to bed. Your whole evening routine will start to become much more structured and reliable if you make a decision like that.

You can make a decision ahead of time about how often you post on social media, if that's something you're doing to build your practice, to build a book of business. If you default in the moment decision making, you're going to let other work take priority over that business development, right?

You can make decisions ahead of time about how many hours you bill each day. This is something that I do with my clients so frequently. We make a decision ahead of time about what the number is going to be each day, and they make sure they hit that number. That way their billables are really consistent and they don't have to worry or scramble towards the end of the month or the end of the year, any of that. We just have a target; they decide and they set their whole day up to make sure that they reach that.

You can make decisions about how and when you send out invoices. You can make decisions ahead of time that you never discount. That's something that I teach my clients not to do. You can make decisions about when you respond to email and how you respond.

So many people waste time being undecided between whether they acknowledge receipt or whether they send a comprehensive response later. You can make a decision ahead of time of exactly how you approach that scenario every time you encounter it so you stop wasting all that mental energy re-deciding the same thing over and over.

You can also make decisions ahead of time about where you shop for clothes and what specifically you buy. I made that decision myself, I noticed that I would always buy cream-colored tops and that I would never end up wearing them because I always just thought white looked better than cream with any of the things that I was wearing. So eventually, I decided enough, no more cream. And now it's just a no for me. I followed that decision that I've made ahead of time, every time I shop now.

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Okay, those are the examples I have for you. Now listen, I could spend hours and hours and hours talking about all of the decisions ahead of time that you can possibly make in your life. And perhaps at some point I'll do a part two where I give you more examples of this. But what I really want to encourage you to do is borrow some of these for yourself, that's why I gave you so many examples in this episode. I know it was kind of a long list, but I wanted to give you ideas that you could borrow.

I also wanted to give you a bunch of examples so you can put on your own thinking cap and use these examples as a source of inspiration to figure out what decisions you can make ahead of time to free up your own mental energy and simplify your own life, okay? You want to pick decisions ahead of time that are bespoke to you and your life, that best support you. This isn't one size fits all.

I also want to make sure that you don't use this list against yourself. I gave you a long list, I don't want you to try and implement all of these decisions ahead of time all at the same time. Pick one decision, make one decision at a time and master it. Put it in place and then add another one. Master the one after that and then keep repeating the process. Okay?

Don't overwhelm yourself here. If you do, you're not going to be effective, you won't follow through. And I'm going to talk about this, specifically it's the topic of constraint, more in the next episode. But for now I just want you to know you're not doing yourself any favors if you overwhelm yourself by taking on too much. You'll get discouraged and then you'll give up. So don't do that, take this one decision ahead of time at a time.

Speaking about following through, I want to add one more thing here. People always say to me, okay, I made the decision ahead of time, but now comes the hard part, actually honoring the decision ahead of time and following through with what you've decided. Be careful not to conflate ease with comfort. Following the decision you made ahead of time is actually the easier thing to do. It just isn't always the most comfortable, okay?

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With that in mind, let's talk about the voice in your head that's telling you not to follow through. That voice may not be there with every decision ahead of time that you make. For a lot of mine I have such a compelling argument for why I made the decision ahead of time in the first place that I have absolutely no mind drama on following through with it.

A couple of my decisions ahead of time though, I do have that voice in the back of my head that's whispering to me, "Olivia, just break your rule just this once. It's totally okay. It'll be fine." And if that's you, if that's happening for you as well, I want you to know that it's totally normal.

You also have to expect that it's going to continue to be there though. Because if you make that voice being there a problem, if you make it mean that something's gone wrong, you're really going to stumble and struggle when it comes to following through and honoring the decision that you made ahead of time.

For me, I always have a voice when I'm coming into my house with carry out, normally if it's pizza this is when the voice seems to be the loudest. I always want to walk into my living room and put the pizza down and not put my car keys in the drawer. And every single time I catch that voice in my head, I call it out and I say, "No, no, no, that's not what we're doing. The keys go in the drawer before you sit down to eat. That's where they go, that's our protocol. That's the decision we've already made."

Same thing when I crawl into bed at night, and I get all comfy and I forgot to plug my phone in. And I have all my blankets situated, and my pillow situated, and I'm cozy and I don't want to move. That voice is whispering to me, "It's okay, you don't have to plug your phone in. It'll be fine. It'll be okay tomorrow. It won't make a difference."

And I catch myself and I say, "No, that's not the decision we already made. That's not what we do here." And I make myself get up from under the covers, reach for my phone cord. And it's not a big deal, obviously, but it does require me to embrace some discomfort in order to honor the decision ahead of time.

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Same thing happens with the calendar requirement that I have where I make the calendar event immediately. I schedule the event so I avoid any double-booking conflicts. I always have this urge to just do it later. I know that's going to happen, so I expect it to come up for me and I just have a conversation with that voice and I say, "No, no, no, that's not what we're doing. You know the rule, make the calendar event right now."

I never make that whisper that's tempting me to abandon the decision I made ahead of time a problem. I just expect it and then I dismiss it. I just don't give it a seat at the table. So if you make a decision ahead of time and you experience resistance when it comes to honoring that decision and following through on it, what I want you to do is identify the feeling that you'll be forced to feel if you just force yourself to honor the decision. Find that one word emotion and then gag and go through that discomfort.

I'm always going to bring you back to that, okay? That's the process of making decisions ahead of time. Make the decision, go to honor it, if there's resistance, make sure you're familiar with the compelling argument you have for making the decision in the first place. Identify the feeling you'll be forced to feel, and then gag and go through feeling that discomfort.

Now, questions that you can ask yourself in order to help you identify the decisions ahead of time that you want to make that set you up for success. I want you to gather data and make data driven decisions about these decisions ahead of time.

So I want you to think each week about the week before, what worked and what didn't. And what decisions could you make ahead of time that would remedy what didn't work? Other questions to ask include what decisions do you make most frequently? Identify those decisions and figure out what decisions you could make ahead of time in that area.

What decisions do you hate making, right? What decisions can you make ahead of time there to really avoid having to remake those decisions that you don't like making? What decisions can you make that would make your life simpler? Kind of the converse of this is what makes this situation hard?

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What makes this task hard? That'll help you start to problem solve and identify areas where you might be able to make decisions ahead of time in order to simplify things. Another question is how can this be easy?

And last but not least, you want to make sure you're making decisions ahead of time that are in line with your preference, otherwise you won't honor them. So a good example of this is you can decide ahead of time that you're going to wake up at six o'clock every day. But if you don't want to wake up at six o'clock every day, you're probably not going to stick to that decision.

So ask yourself, what's my preference here? And be really honest with your answer and come up with a decision ahead of time that takes that preference into account and honors it, okay?

That's what I've got for you this week. Go out, brainstorm, take some of these examples, apply them in your own life, come up with your own decisions ahead of time that you can make. And I would love to hear about some of the decisions ahead of time that you come up with.

I know that you're going to have amazing ideas so reach out to me, DM me on social media, send me an email at Olivia@thelessstressedlawyer. Tell me what decisions you come up with, I would die to hear them. All right? Have a beautiful week, I'll talk to you in the next episode.

Oh, and one more thing. If you enjoyed today's show and don't want to worry about missing an episode, be sure to follow the show wherever you listen to podcasts. And if you haven't already, I'd really appreciate it if you would leave a rating and review to let me know what you think about *The Less Stressed Lawyer* podcast.

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