

## Ep #95: The Sliding Doors Fallacy



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Olivia Vizachero

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You're listening to *The Less Stressed Lawyer* podcast, Episode 95. Today, we're talking all about sliding doors. 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 overwhelmed 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.

Well, hello there. How are you? I am doing so well. I just got back from Miami. I just hosted my first Obsessed Retreat in South Beach, and it went so incredibly well. We had the best group of people. And we got to work, y'all. We covered so much over the course of the three workshop days, and then all of the goodness in between, before, and after those workshop days.

I had a really incredible welcome reception. And then, we had this stunningly beautiful farewell dinner at one of my favorite restaurants, actually in the world, but definitely in Miami. It was just four days full of goodness.

I also took... When you join one of my retreats, we do what I call a "returners retreat". So, I do a special VIP excursion for the people who come back time after time. I rented this really incredible yacht, and we all went out on the water and spent a day out just cruising around. We had so much fun together. So, it was quite a full week. But it was so, so, so good.

I hope you are doing just as well. Now that I'm back in Charleston, I'm back at it, diving back into work, and we're diving back into the podcast episodes. I want to talk today about a topic that I reference all the time in my coaching, and I use it so frequently that I thought it would be really helpful to spell it out or lay it out for you here.

I want to introduce you to the concept of "sliding doors". If you've never seen the movie *Sliding Doors* with Gwyneth Paltrow, definitely go watch it. I'm not going to sit here and tell you that it's my favorite movie, because it's

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absolutely not. But I do find the concept that the movie is based upon really relevant to the coaching that I do with my clients.

So, I'm not going to give you any spoiler alerts here. But in the beginning of the movie, Gwyneth Paltrow is running to catch a subway train. And as she's doing that, right as she's approaching the doors to the subway car, the movie splits into two different realities.

In the first reality, she gets on the train, and the doors closed right behind her. And in the second reality, the doors closed right in front of her face, and she doesn't get on the train. As the story unfolds, she ends up living two totally different lives based on just that one moment in time.

Now, as the viewer being a member of the audience, you get to see how the two different storylines play out. That's the unique experience that you have when a movie is constructed that way. It's sort of like the *Choose Your Own Adventure* books. Maybe that's why we ended up doing this to ourselves, because we grew up reading these types of stories, where you are able to see it play out more than one way.

But that's not the human experience. And yet, I see people take this concept of the sliding doors and really weaponize it against themselves as they go through their lives. So, what I watch my clients do when they're making a decision, they're confronted with the options available to them, and then invariably, they choose.

As time unfolds they see the consequences, whether they be good or bad, of the decisions that they make. So, what they do is they end up picking apart and finding all of the faults, they essentially, issue spot. Looking for all the negatives, all of the cons, of whatever choice they chose. And then, they create an alternate reality.

So, they create a sliding doors experience, where in the alternate version of reality, the option that they didn't choose, everything in that story is better. They convince themselves that they made the wrong choice, they made a bad choice. And in the version that they didn't choose, everything goes

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really well. It was the preferred way that they should have chosen, but they didn't.

This is such a painful way to think about decisions and the choices that we make in our lives. Because the truth of the matter is, we just don't have this capability as humans. We don't have the ability to envision the sliding doors alternate reality and understand what that experience would have been like.

We don't have the ability to compare and contrast based on actual facts. All you're ever doing is constructing a scenario in your head based on absolutely nothing. You don't know how things would have unfolded. You also don't know what else would have changed.

So, people love to think that everything would be just as good, if not better, if you would have gone down an alternate path. Not realizing that when you change one variable, you change everything. Quite literally, the concept in sliding doors is that you miss one train and you live a completely different life.

People want to keep all of the parts of their lives that they do like, but change one decision and think that everything would be the same, but better. But you can't just mess with variables and expect for most of your life to stay the same. And then, for the parts that you don't like, to be better. That's not how it works.

When you start messing with the recipe you don't know what's going to come out on the other side. Now, again, I really want to emphasize here that we construct the sliding doors reality based on nothing. You come up with an idea in your head about what life would have been like had you chosen a different option than you chose, and you decide that that reality would have been better.

But you don't know that that's the case, because you're not basing it on any real information. It's just this idea that you've constructed with that beautiful brain of yours.

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If you're someone who really struggles with regret, this episode is definitely for you. Because this is ultimately what you're doing, right? You made a choice at one point in your life, and you've seen how that decision has played out, and you've been faultfinding with that decision.

So, you've been examining your life, looking for all of the things that you don't like about it, all of the ways that you're choosing to believe that that decision was wrong, that it wasn't the right decision, that it was a bad decision.

And then you're regretting your decision, because in your mind you've created an alternate reality, under this concept of the sliding doors alternate universe, where had you made a different decision than the one you originally made, everything in your life would be better. We simply just don't know that. You don't have any information to understand how it would have worked out in an alternate universe.

I think the first part in breaking this habit, the first step in making this mindset shift, is just acknowledging that that is an inherent limitation of the human experience. We don't have the sliding doors capability. Our brains aren't able to do that. We don't have that skill or ability as humans. That's simply not how the world works.

We just, unfortunately... you can think unfortunately, if you want to, sometimes I put that word in parentheses.... Unfortunately, the only way we experience the world is that we make a choice and then we get to see how that choice plays out. And we have to live with the FOMO and the worry that it could have gone differently.

But choosing to think that you missed out, or choosing to think that things could have gone differently, and most certainly better, that's what most people choose to believe, and then they really punish themselves and create a lot of negative emotion in their lives as a result of that.

You can just choose not to do that. You can choose to recognize that we don't have that ability to understand how two different scenarios play out in the human experience. You're just constrained and limited to the one that

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you choose. That's the only option that you get to see play out, because it's the option that you've chosen.

And you just have to live with the not knowing how the other options work out, because you'll never have the ability to pick one thing and understand how the other stuff unfolds. It just doesn't work that way. You don't have to love that about the human experience.

I think it would be fun, perhaps, to see how alternate storylines unfold. But I also kind of think that it's a kindness that we don't get to see how things unfold. Because I think we would be much more tortured than we already are, if you could see how every single thing plays out. I also think we'd spent so much time playing that tape forward that we'd miss our lives, when you really think about it.

You wouldn't be able to be in the present moment if you were spending all of your time watching the foreshadowing or watching the future unfold. You'd have to devote time to watching that movie, maybe with the alternate reality glasses on. Is that what it's called? No, it's immersive reality. Thank you, Google, for that.

But we don't have those goggles, at least not in the way where we're able to play out the different options that we have in front of us, and see how the storyline unfolds in each alternate reality so then we can make an informed decision. That's simply not how the human experience works.

We have to make decisions based on incomplete information. And then we have to watch the story unfold in real time, through our lived experience. That's simply just how it works.

Now, in light of accepting that that is simply the limitation of the human experience. That's how we experience the world that we live in; we make decisions, and then we get to watch them play out in real time. What I want you to do is to stop punishing yourself with the sliding doors concept. Okay?

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What I mean by that, when you make a decision, rather than making it and then finding all of the things that were wrong or bad about the decision that you made, and then telling yourself that it would have been better had you made a different decision, what I want you to do... You have a couple different options here.

Option number one, is you can simply admit to yourself that you don't know and you'll never know. You'll never know how the choice that you didn't choose would play out. There is simply no way of having that information. There's no one you can pay to get it. There's no way to create it for yourself. You'll simply never know.

And if you remind yourself that you'll simply never know you can start to release your attachment to that alternate storyline. Because the truth is, you're just fabricating it in your head. So, that's one option, you can just recognize that you'll never know what that version looks like.

The other option, is instead of weaponizing the alternate version, and deciding that it was of course going to be better than whatever it is that you actually chose, you can do the opposite. You can decide that even though you don't know what it was going to be like it must have been worse than whatever it is you chose.

You're making that determination based on the exact same information that you're making the determination that the choice that you didn't choose would have been better. And by that, I mean you're making it based on nothing. Because you don't ever have that information.

So, if you're going to make a decision or determination that it would have played out differently, I highly suggest you decide, based on no information, that it would have turned out worse rather than deciding that it would have turned out better.

Think about this for a second. Think about fork-in-the-road moments that you've encountered in your own life. If you have regret from decisions you've made in the past, you can use that regret to start to identify where



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you're engaging in the sliding doors fallacy and using it against yourself to really create a lot of negative emotion for yourself in your life.

Think about... Maybe you said 'yes' to a job, and you really regretted taking that job. Or maybe you passed on an opportunity that you really wish you would have taken. You made the decision, and now you're beating yourself up for whatever decision you chose.

You're telling yourself that you should have made a different choice; you shouldn't have taken this job, you should have held out and looked for another one. You don't know what would have happened in that alternate reality. You have no way of knowing that.

So, you can tell yourself that choosing the job that you're currently in, that you hate, was the wrong decision. Or you can just have your own back and decide that you should have taken it because you did, and that it's better that you took it and find all of the reasons why that's true. Versus telling yourself that you shouldn't have taken it, and that it would have been better had you not.

Same thing for anyone who's ever quit a job and has regretted it. It's so easy to believe that you should have stayed somewhere, especially when you do know what that experience was like. Only for the time you were in it though, you don't know what it would have been like had you stayed there. You have no way to know that.

Would you have been fired from your job? You don't know. You don't know how anything would have unfolded. Maybe you would have worked on a case that would have really caused you strife. Or you would have represented a client that you ended up hating, that complained about you to your boss. You have no idea to know how that would unfold.

But we tell ourselves that it would have been better if we stayed. Maybe you would have never met your significant other had you stayed. Maybe you would have gotten divorced had you stayed, and you wouldn't be in your marriage right now. Right?



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People love to also do this with relationships. They tell themselves they should have stayed with someone, or they shouldn't have married or ended up with who they ended up with. I've watched people do this with kids, "I shouldn't have had kids. I should have had kids."

We don't know what the alternate universe would have looked like, and yet we decide that it would have been better. That it would have been more beautiful. That it would have been a more enriching experience than the experience that we're currently living in.

I recently just coached a client about this topic, with a financial investment that the client was making. She was getting ready to make, in her opinion, a substantial financial investment, and she was already regretting the choice that she was pretty certain she was going to make.

She was running down all of the worse-case scenarios and selling herself on why she shouldn't do it, even though she had talked herself into why she should do it. She was foreshadowing that she was going to be doing the exact same thing once she invested the money. That she'd be telling herself that she shouldn't have invested it, and that it was a mistake, it was a bad idea, that it wouldn't work out, that they were going to lose money.

She was afraid of all the regret that she would experience if she moved forward and it didn't pan out the way that she wanted it to. She was already trying to step into identifying and exploring both alternate realities in the sliding doors example.

As we talked through this, it became very evident to her that that simply isn't something that you get to do. That is one of the things that I've taught you on this podcast, the concept of the "false third option". This is an example of the false third option, where you want to know ahead of time how something unfolds, how something pans out. That's just not available to you.

So, you have two options. You can invest and see what happens, or you can not invest and guarantee that the bad thing doesn't happen, and also guarantee that the good thing doesn't happen, right? Those are the options

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that you have available. But you do not have the capability to run out both scenarios, and to fast forward the tape, go into the future and see how it all unfolds, and then make your decision based on that.

You also don't have the option of making the decision, going into the future, and seeing how your decision unfolds, and then comparing that against the tape from the alternate reality. Knowing how that would have unfolded, and then measuring your lived experience with the alternate reality experience. None of that is possible.

So again, if you've been doing this to yourself and creating so much negative emotion in your life as a result of it, I urge you and invite you to stop. Stop indulging in this sliding doors comparison that doesn't even exist. It is an indulgent behavior that doesn't serve you at all.

It's a waste of your mental energy. It's a waste of your emotional capacity. It doesn't provide you any benefit at all. So you can stop doing it right now. Okay?

Once you identify that you're doing this, that you're indulging in the sliding doors comparison, you can catch yourself and you can stop. You can remind yourself that (unfortunately) we don't have the ability to play out both scenarios. And instead of deciding that the option you didn't pick was worse, remind yourself that you either have absolutely no idea how it would have unfolded... because the truth is that you don't...

Or based on the exact same information, which is no information at all, just decide that your current lived experience is better. You're not sure how it would have unfolded, but it would have been worse. Okay?

I hope this helps you dial down the regret, and dial down the emotional suffering that you experience in your day-to-day life. Alright?

That's what I've got for you this week, my friends. I hope you have a beautiful week, and I'll talk to you in the next episode.

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Thanks for listening to *The Less Stressed Lawyer* podcast. If you want more info about Olivia Vizachero or the show's notes and resources from today's episode, visit [www.TheLessStressedLawyer.com](http://www.TheLessStressedLawyer.com).