

121. Decision Making: The Power of Balancing Emotion and Logic

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Welcome to the Empowered brain, the only podcast using science, psychology and coaching to help you rewire your brain and create a life you love with your host, Dr. Vanessa Calderon, a Harvard grad physician, master coach, and mother of two.

Hi, sweet friends. Welcome back to the podcast. I am so excited to bring you this topic today on how to use both emotion and logic when you're making decisions. I'm going to teach you why it's incredibly important, what parts of the brain you're accessing when you're able to utilize both, and how to avoid some of the most common pitfalls. Now before we jump into the episode, I want to share a few announcements. Number one, if there is a topic that you really want me to cover, please send me a message you can just DM me @VanessaCalderonMD I hang out on Instagram. If you're not already following me on Instagram, I'd recommend you go out and follow me. That's where I post a ton of great content at @VanessaCalderonMD.

I have an episode coming out on self-discipline that actually came from a listener request. So please feel free to reach out to me, I'll do my best actually respond to all those direct messages myself personally. And I will cover the topics if they haven't already been covered. Next update is if you love what you're listening to hear, and if you're loving what you're learning, and you really want to take these tools to the next level. And that is really start applying them to your own life. I recommend that you check out my comprehensive coaching program. It's called the journey. The journey is open right now. So you can join right now you've worked directly with me and you join this incredible community of other really smart women who care about your success just as much as you care about your success. It's for really smart women who want to achieve more and make sure they're achieving their potential without stress and burnout. You'll learn how to overcome procrastination, and how to be the best leader you can be. You'll learn how to overcome impostor syndrome.

One of the most important things you'll learn there is how to continue to give yourself self-compassion through all of them. Because in my experience, the more self-compassion you can give yourself, the faster you will succeed. Okay, let's jump into the topic today. So this actually came from, I went to watch the Barbie movie with a girlfriend of mine. And there is a part in the Barbie movie where, if you haven't yet seen it, I highly recommend it. It's a brilliant movie. It's hilarious. And they poke fun at a lot of you know, systemic issues of oppression. And it's just hilarious. So there's a part where there's a woman speaking in front of the Supreme Court Justice, and she says her big stance and she says look, I can use emotion and logic at the same time, and it doesn't devalue my power. And I just thought that was so hilarious. Because how many times have you been told not to be too emotional? How many times has someone tried to invalidate what you have to share because of your emotions? And how many times like think about when you were growing up? Especially if you're a woman a woman of color?

Maybe you heard this in Spanish? You No. No Joris noisiest animals your novel. I just when I say that in Spanish, it just triggers a lot of my old memories of when I was growing up. Because the truth is that we've been socialized, to not use emotion, that emotion is going to make us weak, that emotion is going to make us irrational. And I've personally experienced, you know, the being invalidated when I've tried to. Now I was moving emotional, was just making a comment. And I remember a dude in a meeting trying to invalidate me, I'll share that story in a second. But point is that using emotion and logic is incredibly important because it taps into parts of your brain that you don't access when you're just using logic. It taps into really your inherent wisdom.

It allows you to access your personal values, your desires, and your concerns. And when you ignore them, what you're actually doing is you're ignoring what truly matters to you. And when you ignore what matters to you, that causes desert decision regret later. It causes decisions to regret later when you make a decision solely based on logic. You might later on regret your decision for not following your intuition or for not following your heart. So it's really important to use both well You're able to combine both emotional insight and logical reasoning. It also leads to better decision quality. Your emotions can highlight potential risks, they can highlight motivations and consequences that pure logic sometimes overlooks. In fact, you know, there's an entire field of economics behind behavioral economics that takes into account human emotion. Because guess what humans always use their emotions, when they're making decisions. Even the person out there, that's the most that you think might be the most rational person, the most stoic person who never uses emotion. They also use their emotions. They just think that they're not, why, because what have we been socialized to do and see, we've been socialized to see this example of like stoicism, as you know, very, they must be so wise, like, they're just, they're, they're just using their wisdom to make a decision. Wisdom actually, is a combination of emotion and logic. That's what wisdom is.

So we've had all of these examples of women being dismissed their opinions being dismissed, because you know, they've been perceived as too emotional, or they've been disregarded. Or they've been passed over for leadership positions, I'm sure you've experienced something like this, or you've seen someone like this. So I just want to highlight that I know why we don't use emotion, because I know how we've been socialized. I know the double standard that exists that, you know, women should be kind, but they shouldn't, shouldn't be too emotional. They should be stern, but they shouldn't be, you know, bi tch. And so I just want to highlight that that double standard exists, and it's really hindering the way we're all making decisions, and really the universal consciousness.

I remember, here's the story. I referred to earlier, many, many years ago, when COVID was at the very, you know, it COVID had first started and no one knew anything, I was running my hospital. So for those of you just listening and are new to the podcast, I'm an ER doc by training. And I was a department chair for close to a decade, I've been doing leadership work for close to 20 years. And I was running my hospitals Incident Command Center, and I was a department chief of my emergency department. And I was also running the entire hospital's Incident Command Center for COVID. And, you know, I knew just as much information as most hospitals did, which wasn't much and we were all just learning as we were going. And we were changing things all the time. And we were just doing our best. And I, you know, my kids were in a preschool at the time, and I was the only physician mom, I was the only physician parent

at the preschool. And the principal at the preschool called me and said, I don't know what to do, what do you recommend we do? And so I said, we should get other parents together.

And we should make sure everyone's on the same page, we should use, you know, what we have, which is the CDC recommendations. And so she brought all the parents together. And I recommended that the kids do their best to use a mask. And here we have kids between the ages of two and four. So if you have a two year old, if you've ever had a two year old, you know how hard it is to have them keep anything on their head or face. And so but I said, you know, we should do our best because all we know so far is that masks might be really helpful. And so we have this meeting with the parents, and we have a parent on there a dad who is arguing against using masks, and he said my kids never can have it on that's ridiculous. We shouldn't have masks. This is so ridiculous. And so, so I share us like, well, here's what the data says. And so I think we might, we should just try to use your best. And then he says, well, instead of being really impassioned, let's just talk about all of this together and hear what everyone else has to say.

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He called me impassioned, but his impassioned impassioned means that I'm being too emotional. He was trying to invalidate me here I am the only physician running hospitals and sending commands and am only coming with evidence as I'm talking about this. And I experienced that. And I think because at the time, I had already been aware of a lot of the things that I teach here. I'd already been aware of that I have already been aware of how women had been invalidated in the past by being too emotional. It really triggered me not in a way that I yelled at him or got upset, but I did get triggered and angry. And I remember after the call, I told my husband and my husband was on the call too. And he didn't didn't pick up on that. Because oftentimes these things happen and because they happen so frequently. You know, we don't even realize how we're being gaslit we don't even realize how they're trying to invalidate our opinions. And again, my husband one of the most woke white dudes out there, didn't even pick up on The fact that this guy used emotion to try to invalidate me.

So I just say that because I want you to know, I shared that experience, because I want you to know that I'm super aware of how often this stuff happens and how it's probably happening to us more than we realize. And now that you've like, listened to her that story, you might realize you might have that awareness and start seeing more and more of it. Okay, so we talked a little bit about why it's important to use emotion and logic when you're making decisions. So again, when you use both, it helps you access your inherent wisdom, it helps you access your personal values, your desires, and your concerns, and it increases your decision quality because you're now able to see things that you wouldn't have seen by just logic alone, like potential risks or motivations. It helps you reduce regret later. So when you make decisions solely based on logic, you might later regret your decision for not following your intuition.

Emotions can also support you in being more creative and more innovative when you're trying to solve problems. So that's incredibly helpful. And it will reduce stress on the way it reduces stress is when you think about ignoring your emotions are suppressing your emotions, what that ultimately leads to is emotional turmoil. You have those emotions inside, and then you start second-guessing yourself afterward when you're able to integrate your emotions into your decision-making process. It'll help

reduce all of that internal conflict, and it'll alleviate that stress. Alright, so how do we actually do it? So I'm going to talk about how we actually do it by also talking about some of the common pitfalls, I'm going to do those two things at the same time. Because I think it's important for us to understand that there are some common pitfalls.

And you know, the devil is always in the details. Alright, so the first most common pitfall is the emotional bias that can happen when we are using our emotions. So I think it's important for us to just realize that I think all of us know that when we are on an emotional overdrive, so if we're very, very angry, very, very sad, or very, very hard, you know, when we feel all of those emotions, and they're flooding our body, it's not the best time to make a big decision. Because the truth is that we are going to be biased by those emotions. And, you know, our brain is wired to make decisions really, really fast when we're afraid or scared. That's how we've been kept alive for so long. That's why the human, the human body, the human spirit, there's so we're so resilient because we are able to stay alive because we can make decisions quickly when we're afraid when we think our life is in danger. But we want to be careful because oftentimes, our life is not in danger. So when we're emotionally flooded, when we're feeling angry, hurt, or upset, it's okay, we have time, and it's safe to pause. So here are some things that we can do to overcome emotional bias.

One of the most important things is the practice of mindfulness, which is just awareness. So what I say what I teach here, usually to my students is notice how these emotions feel in your body. When you're feeling really angry, how does that feel in your body? Is your face red? Is your stomach churning? When you're feeling really sad? What does that feel like in your body? For me, I get this, like, kind of this upset in the middle of my stomach. How does it feel when you're really disappointed because you don't want to make a decision when you're feeling really disappointed? For me, disappointment feels like this discomfort in my chest. So how do these emotions feel in your body? And it's important to know that because oftentimes when we're processing these emotions before we've had a chance to actually process we're first just feeling them. And when we're feeling them, it's hard for us to separate our core self or sage are, you know, the inner wisdom that we have inside, from our emotions from what I call our ego.

So from that, it's really hard to separate those two things. And the way you can separate those two things is by noticing what's happening to your body because your body starts to feel your emotions before your brain has had a chance to fully process what's going on. So before you've had a chance to fully process that you're disappointed, all you know is that you don't feel great, you feel kind of blah, your stomach just feels kind of weird. And then you're like, Oh, I'm feeling disappointed. And sometimes when you're really hurt or upset, you're just really angry, you know, your face is getting red. And maybe in those moments, you know, you're angry, but you're labeling yourself as angry as opposed to okay, I'm having a thought. It's making me angry. It's not who I am at my core. It's just this thought or this experience that has made me angry. So what you want to do is you want to practice self-awareness in those moments. You want to recognize and acknowledge that you're having those big emotions without judgment, I say without judgment because what we often do is I shouldn't be disappointed, or I shouldn't be angry, or I should be over this already.

If you catch yourself using the word should, that is just an indication that what you're actually doing is you're noticing your emotion, but you're noticing it with judgment. And when you notice with judgment, you're actually just shaming yourself. And it's really hard to process an emotion from a place of shame. So what you want to do is you want to notice the emotion and just notice it. Okay, I noticed that I'm really pissed off right now. That's it, just notice the emotion. And what you want to do is you want to understand that emotions are natural, they're gonna keep coming. And you want to try to process. So I taught the COAL mnemonic before as a great way to process emotions, scroll back a few episodes, it's the COAL mnemonic. I think it's episodes like either 117 one each, no one LinkedIn, one of those three episodes, but I'll link in the show notes here. So in that episode, I specifically teach you a tool of awareness that's so simple to use, and you can use it every time you're trying to process a big emotion. So when you're processing those emotions, what you want to do is you want to identify the specific emotion you're experiencing.

And then you want to think Okay, well, how would this influence my choice, when you're pissed, you're probably going to make a decision you wouldn't be happy with later. So you want to pause in those moments. So once you're able to notice your emotion and pause, then you can practice something called self-regulation or self-command, which allows you to then turn off your amygdala, your amygdala, your fear center of your brain, that's where all your like really pissed off angry emotions come from, what you're able to do is your end, it also allows you to turn off other parts of your brain that are on overdrive. So if you're really sad, or if you're really disappointed, what you want to do in those moments, after you've, you've processed them, after you've used a tool, like the CO mnemonic that I teach, you can then practice self-regulation or self-command.

So self-regulation allows you to turn off those parts of your brain and then command your brain to come back to the prefrontal cortex. So the prefrontal cortex is our higher order brain, it's the part of our brain that separates us from all other mammals. And it's really incredibly important for judgment for social interaction for planning. So that's the part of your brain you want to access when you're making decisions. And when you practice, self-regulation allows you to do that, I have an entire episode where I teach, like 13 Super simple exercises in self-regulation. I'll also link that in the show notes in case you're interested. So the self-regulation tool, so teachers, so simply using the take, like 10 seconds each, so I recommend you listen to that episode if you don't have a self-regulation tool that you really like. Okay, so once you've, once you notice your emotion, once you practice self-regulation, then you can calm your mind and say, okay, clearly I'm upset, I can relax my mind here, I can go back to my prefrontal cortex. And now knowing how I feel, I can let me think, let me let me access the logical part of my brain.

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And from there, you can then make a decision. So that's overcoming emotional bias by practicing awareness, reflecting and pausing, and practicing self-regulation. So the other thing you want to do when you're accessing both emotional logic, here's another common pitfall is you want to avoid overthinking. So oftentimes, we're what we do is we judge our intuition and we say, is it really my intuition? Or is it something else? And then you don't trust your intuition? And then you go back and forth? Like, should I do this? Should I do this? Or should I do this? So what you want to do is you want

to avoid overthinking. So how do you avoid overthinking, you avoid overthinking by making super clear decision-making criteria, you want to make clear decision-making criteria in advance.

So what are like, sometimes some of the decisions you're going to have to make are uncomfortable because you're going to probably disappoint somebody. And so oftentimes, that leads to people-pleasing behaviors, right? We say yes, to a lot of things that we don't actually want to do because we don't want to disappoint somebody. So what you want to do ahead of time is say, Okay, let me get super clear on the decision I have to make.

What is the Ask that's been asked of me? For example, once I'm super clear on the ask, let me get clear on what that's going to take from me. Is it more time? Is it money? Is it time away from my family? Is it more work, so get super clear on the things that are being asked of you? And then from there, say, okay, so, if I say yes to this, what am I saying no to? That's one of the most important things to realize every time you say yes to something, you're saying no to something else. So what are you saying no to? Because the truth is, sometimes decisions are going to be complicated. They're going to be hard. And sometimes you're going to disappoint somebody. You've just got to decide who you want. When I disappoint, is it your family? Or is it somebody at work? You know, is it yourself? Or is it somebody else? Because oftentimes when we say yes to something to not disappoint that other person, we end up disappointing ourselves.

So just get super clear on your decision-making criteria. And think about like, is there anything you need to say yes, or anything you need to say? No. Sometimes you need a little bit more information. Sometimes you need to ask for something else, like, Okay, I might be able to do this, but I need XYZ, I need a little bit more time I need money, I need to make sure that they're going to pay me for this. Maybe they'll pay for travel, stuff like that. So think about all of those criteria, and then I recommend you set a time limit. Okay, I'll get all the information that I need. And I'll make a decision by 4 pm on Thursday.

The reason why it's really important to do that is if you don't set a time limit, and there is no time limit on the decision, you will go back and forth and just hold yourself in indecision for a long time. And indecision feels horrible. When you're in indecision, all you're doing is spending precious brain space, thinking about this, it's always in the back of your mind, because it's not like it goes away. Because you're avoided. It's always there. It's just taking up precious brain space. And then what you want to do is stick to your time limit, and commit to your decision. And once you make your decision, I highly recommend that no matter what you support yourself, you don't go back. You don't say I should have done something different. You say I made the best decision I could with the information that I had. And then you move forward. Always have your own back when you're making these decisions. One of the other things I highly recommend when you're just starting to overthink is to think about the consequences of not making the decision.

What happens if you don't make the decision, maybe you just continue to think about it, maybe it's causing extra stress, it may be you're putting a project off, maybe you don't think about the decision, the consequence of not making a decision. Alright, two more pitfalls I want to talk about here. The other one is preventing emotional suppression. this entire episode is about using both emotion and logic

when you're making decisions because it's really important to access both to really think about like, how does this decision make me feel? And sometimes the decision makes you feel joyful, happy, great aligned. That's awesome. And sometimes the decision makes you feel uncomfortable. And when the decision makes you feel uncomfortable, get clear on where that discomfort is coming from, is the discomfort coming from fear? Like I'm just so afraid, I don't know if this is the right decision, because I don't want to fail. In that instance, what you actually need to access and what's really beautiful, and here's an opportunity from the universe for you to access. This is courage. Because of courage, my friends never feel good.

Courage always feels really uncomfortable. Because if courage felt good, it wouldn't be courage. There's no courage without fear. First, there's no courage. So you got to get super clear in how the emotions make you feel. And the way you avoid emotional suppression is essentially by expressing your emotions. So say them out loud. Right? Well, this makes me feel really good. Or I feel really aligned, I had this is obvious, like, Yep, I'm gonna just do this, or gosh, I feel really uncomfortable doing this, I don't think this is the right decision. This actually makes me feel really sad. Or the consequence of this makes me feel really angry. So think about your decision, say them out loud, put them in a journal, and talk about them to a trusted colleague, if you have somebody you can talk, talk this out with, maybe it's your partner at home. Because what you don't want to do is you don't want to avoid thinking about your emotions and say, Alright, let me just think logically, let me just make a column a column B here and just think logically about this.

Because when you suppress your emotions, remember, we talked about this earlier, and what will eventually happen is you'll create a ton of stress inside of your brain, your body, your spirit, really, because you're ignoring the things that really matter to you. So, some techniques to actually support you in emotional Express expression are getting super clear, taking a lot of really good deep breaths and breathing when you're expressing your emotions and just feeling safe and comfortable. Go somewhere where you feel safe to express your emotions. In the journey, we talk a lot about emotional expression. So we make sure that you know we create a super safe space in there for people to really feel comfortable expressing how it is that they actually feel. Because for a long time, we've been taught to avoid our feelings. And really, your feelings are your Northstar.

They're your guiding light. It's what's going to support you in creating a very long, fulfilling life. And the last thing I will say is just embrace any emotional intelligence tool or any time anyone's trying to support you with EQ skills, emotional intelligence. really embrace that. So it'll help you, you know, recognize, understand, and manage your emotions. We do that a ton inside the journey also. But think about ways that you can also manage your Mind Manager emotions, that's really going to support you. Right? So with friends, we talked about a lot today, really, we talked about the importance of understanding that it's safe to balance your emotions and logic and decision-making. And notice that that bias does exist, that people will still say that, or sometimes well, meaning men don't even realize that they're being biased when they say things like that, when they say, you know, stop being so emotional or things like that.

And here's what I'll say, in those moments, when you are showing up as your best self when you're accessing your emotion and logic to make decisions. And when you're still hearing those, those that

type of oppression when people are still saying things like that are still accessing the double standards of men and women, you know, I, I would just, you know, ask you to ask yourself, how is it that I want to show up? When the world is like this? How do I want to show up when this person is being like this? That's really helped me when I answer that question for myself, how do I want to show up? The answer that comes back to me is, well, I want to show bravery, I don't want to back down. I want to show up calm. I want to show up really thoughtful, and I want to be afraid. Again, I want to have courage. So answer that question for yourself and see what comes up for you.

The truth is that the world is a double standard that the patriarchy does exist and that women will continue to be labeled as emotional until we completely dismantle the patriarchy. And that's, you know, not going to happen overnight. We all know, but the point is it doesn't have to stop us from really accessing the highest part of our brain and really accessing our own inner wisdom when we're making decisions. We just have to do it in a way that's aligned with the decision we want to make and with really our highest-right sweet friends. I hope you enjoyed this episode. I will see you next week. Sending you all so much love. Make sure you take care of yourself today. Give yourself what it is that you need. Alright, hasta la Proxima

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Hey, sweet friends, if you love what you're learning, then you've got to join us on the journey. It's my all-inclusive program and the best community out there giving you the education you never knew you needed to help you create a life you love. Join us at VanessaCalderonmd.com/join. I'll see you there.