

## **Making the Choice to Live Full-Time**

Bernard J. Mohr

## Making the Choice to Live Full-Time

Bernard J. Mohr

The difference between *full-time living* and merely *existing* often comes down to *choices* and how we handle them. In exercising choice, we become alive, and this brings with it a greater chance of getting what we want and an increased sense of self-determination.<sup>1</sup>

Exercising choice is not always easy. It requires risk, commitment, and usually some degree of involvement. And even these are not enough: one needs to *recognize* the point at which a choice is available. The awareness of such “choice points” is fundamental to exercising choice effectively.

For example, when the trainer in your group asked you to “pair up,” did you wait to be chosen or did you actively choose someone? Whichever way you did it, were you *aware of choosing* your action (or inaction), or was it just a reflexive behavior—a habit? Did you consider your options? Did you know what outcome you most wanted?

Such questions deal with your choice points, your self-awareness, your way of getting (or not getting) what you want or need in a group—or, more importantly, in your life. And, they can help you focus on the difference between *full-time* and *part-time* living.<sup>2</sup>

Let me explain. You are living *full-time* when you have feelings of energy flowing through your body (your “juices” are flowing) and when you feel in control of yourself (not to be confused with controlling others). Conversely, you are living *part-time* when you feel “blah,” when you experience yourself as just going through the motions, or when you feel cheated as a result of not making an active choice.

The degree of *full-time living* is directly related to both the number of active choices we make each day *and* to the importance of these choices. Eight conscious choices concerning the color of clothes to be worn today are probably not as significant, for example, as *one* choice involving how to deal with a person in your group whom you find obnoxious (or a person whom you find extremely attractive).

You can increase the chances of successful experimentation by considering *the ranges of choice, awareness of choice points, consequences of exercising choice, and the meaning of choice.*

### Ranges of Choice

Each of us *thinks, feels, and behaves.* These three separate and distinct acts constitute our ranges of choice.

In any given situation we can and do exercise choice about how we conceptualize (think about) what we are experiencing. We can choose to interpret the remarks or behavior of a group member as selfish, funny,

*Bernard J. Mohr is a Principal with Innovation Partners International. His areas of expertise include corporate transformation, high performance/high engagement work systems and leadership for complex organizational change.*

<sup>1</sup> I would like to acknowledge the insight of my friend and colleague Rosemary Gray-Snelgrove, as well as John Glidewell and J.P. Sartre, who are also concerned with choice, choosing, and living.

<sup>2</sup> See also Golembiewski, “Individual Choice about Change: Four Useful Models.”-Eds.

provocative, aggressive, kind, etc. (Commonly, one person will choose one interpretation while another person has a different reaction.)<sup>3</sup>

How we choose to think about a situation will probably influence how we feel about it. (Or we may “choose” our feeling first and then “decide” what we think.) The key point here is that feelings are also a part of the ranges of choice available to us. This is not to say that we can totally manipulate our feelings to be what we want them to be.<sup>4</sup> It is more a recognition that our feelings belong to us, they are ours and *we* have responsibility for them—not as we hear so often in our groups “*you* make me think this and *you* make me feel that,” etc. Certainly we feel in relation to other persons, but to the extent that we “own” the origin of our feelings, we have the opportunity to *choose* them—which I believe preferable to being a puppet-on-a-string to our feelings.

The most common range of choice is, of course, the area of personal behavior. In fact, many participants in experimental groups come to a “laboratory” session to learn more about their behavior and in turn to “try out” new behaviors. In trying out new behavior, in building a wider repertoire of behavior, there are many options among which to choose.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> See Watson, “The Importance of Perception.”-Eds.

<sup>4</sup> In my experience, the concept of controlling your own feelings is, at first glance, repugnant to many people in the human potential field. In fact, I do not wish to imply that one can choose to be artificially happy, sad, hurt, etc., at any given time. It does seem to follow from my acceptance, however, that if others are not “making” myself feel this way or that, and if I am the one that is doing this, perhaps there is some choice involved.

<sup>5</sup> See also Porter, “An Expanding Repertoire of Behavior.”-Eds.

## Awareness of Choice Points

A *choice point* is that moment in time when you have the opportunity to make a decision (and this article focuses on *significant* decisions) about your *thoughts*, your *feelings*, or your *behavior*. A *choice point* is partly characterized by a sense of being at the end of a balance beam: you can go left, right, backwards, or down-but you *cannot* stay indefinitely where you are. A *choice point* requires *choosing*, at least at some level of consciousness.

In order to make good decisions in our ranges of choice, we must have a heightened awareness of these choice points. This awareness can be heightened by paying attention to signals from our bodies (e.g., headaches, physiological discomfort, stomach cramping, overall pleasure sensations, a feeling of a full stomach, etc.).

These, and other signals, are not necessarily themselves indicators of choice points: they are more like a flashing yellow light which is blinking a message of “Caution—Proceed Slowly—There may be a choice point coming up ahead.”

Another way of heightening your awareness is to ask members of your group (or friends/colleagues back home) to act as yellow lights: whenever they see you approaching a potential choice point, they can let you know. (The method of “letting you know” is up to you; some of us need people jumping up and down, while a small nudge is sufficient for others.)

Still another way is to conduct a “choice point review” after the fact. This simply involves sitting down with one or two group members at the end of the day and collectively determining when the choice points occurred for you and how aware you were of each one.

Most people find, as with any new skill, choice point awareness improves with practice. And the more awareness you have, the more you will be able to *exercise* choice. And, the closer you will be to full-time living!

### Consequences of Choosing

Before we rush off to exercise our choices (as a result of our heightened choice point awareness!) there are some consequences to be explored.

Actively choosing a thought, feeling or behavior involves *responsibility*. We can no longer truthfully say, “Well, I really didn’t think about my actions.” or “Well, it’s just the way you made me feel.” The exercising of choice involves *commitment* on your part to the identification of a preferred outcome.

Otherwise why choose? Active choosing therefore involves *risk*. After all, knowing that you have a choice is still no guarantee that you will get what you want or even that others will appreciate your choice! Involvement (with its ever present sidekick, (risk) seems to be both a basic prerequisite and *consequence* of choosing.

On the other hand, choosing typically results in a sense of high energy, a feeling of vitality, and the satisfaction of knowing that consequences resulting from your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are related to the full exercise of your conscious, living humanness. (Getting what you want is also easier when you make conscious choices.)

### Meaning of Choice

Interpreting your own reality is the basis for all choice. Assembling your perceptions into a framework that has meaning requires choice to be exercised, while at the same time creating the basis for further choice. The assignment of meaning and values to perceived “data”

in our world is both the foundation for, and the meaning of, choice.

Choice means to be conscious, to think, to feel, to behave both as observer and participant at the same time. To *be and to be aware of being* is the essence of choice.

### Conclusion

Full-time living may not be for everyone or for everyone all the time. But until we experience it, we cannot make the choice—and, of course paradoxically, to be able to make a “good choice,” we have to choose to experience it. You might say, we have to *choose* to choose!

*Reprints of this article are permitted provided that the author’s name and contact information are clearly listed on each page.*