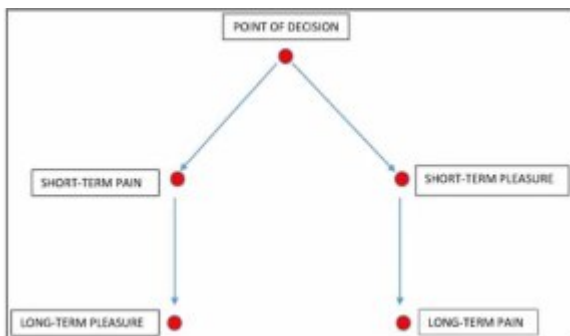
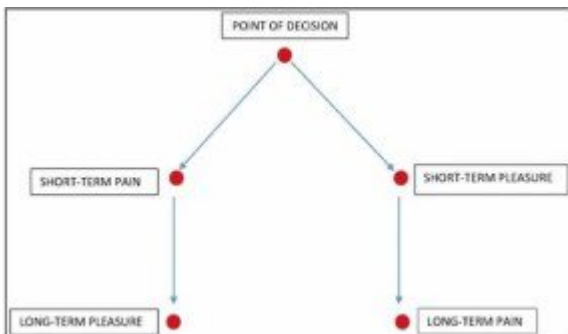


Short-term What, Long-term What? Choose Well.

Sue Bohlin



Of all the wisdom and insight I learned in a three-year lay counseling training, one really stands out. I think of this little chart as “the doghouse.”



Decision-making often involves choosing between short-term pleasure or short-term pain. (Usually it's more like short-term inconvenience.)

Short-term pleasure often leads to long-term pain, and short-term pain often leads to long-term pleasure. What doesn't work, and is a horribly unrealistic expectation for life, is short-term pleasure leading to long-term pleasure! (Wouldn't THAT be nice?!)

Maturity and wisdom is displayed by the choices we make, especially when we exercise patience and self-control, not insisting on the instant-gratification jolt of “I want it NOW!!!” Many of our choices for pleasure in the right-now end up costing us down the road, causing pain later. You know, like that fourth brownie that tastes soooooo good in the moment, but then you can’t zip up your jeans a few days later. Or indulging your child’s demands and whims today because you want to be the “cool parent” and you want them to like you, but then you start to notice the ugliness of that child’s sense of self-absorbed entitlement. Short-term pleasure, even when that pleasure is simply trying to avoid pain, results in long-term unpleasant consequences.

But when we recognize the value of self-control and self-denial in the present, so that we can reap the harvest of pleasure in the future, that’s wisdom. Mark Twain advised, “Do one thing every day you don’t want to do.” That’s good advice, but of course God thought of that much earlier! Using self-control and self-denial is how we fulfill the biblical idea of not indulging the flesh (Galatians 5:16). Getting up early to spend time in God’s word costs you in the moment, but when it has become a habit, that daily time ingesting divine truth and wisdom transforms you. Putting a percentage of your income into savings is a discipline of self-denial in the present day, but it (literally) pays great dividends in the future. Even better, giving generously to Christ’s Kingdom now means you’re sending every penny ahead into your heavenly bank account where God will reward you!

One of my family members really resonated with “the doghouse” when he faced his alcoholism and made many, many decisions to choose the short-term pain of saying no to his desire to drink, and every day he now enjoys the long-term pleasure of a life he can fully enjoy in sobriety and self-control. Another man I know was faced with the decision to choose the short-term pain of integrity, owning and confessing his selfish behavior over several years, or the short-term pleasure of excusing and dismissing his choices that had hurt other people. He chose the short-term pleasure, and now lives in the long-term pain of diminished character and the loss of his family’s trust.

“The doghouse” is helpful for training children (and ourselves!) to think beyond the moment to what they want down the road. Do you want less stress in the morning by taking the time to get your books and clothes and lunch ready tonight? Short-term pain, long-term pleasure. If you give into the temptation to procrastinate (short-term pleasure), how much will you pay for it later (long-term pain)?

Jesus said, “If anyone wants to become My follower, he must deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow Me.” (Luke 9:23) Denying ourselves, taking up our cross, and following Jesus are all about short-term pain with major long-term pleasures!

“The doghouse” is a simple but powerful life-skills tool for your toolbox. What do you want to end up with, long-term pleasure or long-term pain? Choose well today.

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