We are faced with choices almost every minute of every day.

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Some choices you’ll make are mundane, like the ones I just described.

Some of the choices you’ll make are literally the difference between life and death.
Steven Callahan did when he found himself alone on a raft in the ocean - for 76 long and terrifying days, he made the choice to live rather than give up and die.
Sheena Iynengar takes us on a fascinating journey about how we can learn to make better choices.

We’ll explore the assumptions we make about choice, and how it differs depending on the culture and the context the choice is made in.

Buckle your seatbelts and get ready for a roller-coaster ride through the fascinating world of choice.
What is choice?

This seems like a question that should be answered in an undergraduate philosophy class at a liberal arts college.

But it is critical to examine what we believe choice means before we can get down to the business of making better ones.
Most western cultures have grown up with the belief that choice is good.

How else do you explain the thousands of different choices available to us at the grocery store alone? However, choice isn’t always a good thing. In fact, there are some people in the world who believe that more choice is a negative thing.
In a fascinating study, Asian American and Anglo American children were given a set of schoolwork tasks to do. The study concluded that the Asian American children did much better when they believed they were doing what their mothers had picked out for them to do, and the Anglo-American children did much better on tasks where they felt they had the power to choose themselves.

In a similar study, a group of Asian and American students were asked to list what choices they make during a typical day.

The American students listed 50% more choices, including things like brushing their teeth and putting the alarm clock on snooze as choices.
What does this say about choice?

How you see the world greatly determines how your story plays out. This might seem like a small matter, but in reality it can make all the difference.

For instance, how many times have you heard somebody complain that they were “stuck in a terrible job”?

That person is likely to stay in that job (or a similar one) for the rest of their life, living for the weekend until they are six feet under ground.

Another person might look at that situation and say “I don’t like my job right now, but today I’m going to look for another one”.
How do we make choices?

So, now you are aware that we choose what we view as our choices, let’s move on to how we make those choices. The first thing to understand is that we have two systems available to us to make choices.

The first one is the automatic system, which operates effortlessly and subconsciously. Because it never turns off and runs off of emotion, it’s always there influencing our decisions. It’s the system that tells us that an approaching lion might be hazardous to our health, and it’s also the system that tells us that the can of Coca Cola on the table would taste really good right about now.

The second system is our reflective system, which we need to consciously tap into. It’s the system that brings logic and reason into our lives.
4 missteps we all make

Availability

Extremely influenced by the way information is framed

Wired to make connections

Information that supports a point of view that we’ve already decided on
6 ways to make better choices

1. becoming an expert in a subject
2. take advantage of the expertise of others
3. turn choice into a collaborative activity
4. turn to the wisdom of the crowds
5. categorize options
6. opportunity to learn from ourselves
We cannot avoid choice, even if we wanted to. We make hundreds of choices a day, and they literally shape the outcome of our life. If you want a handbook on how they are made, and how you can make the better, this book is for you.

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