

# Choose for the Future

## Assessing the Long-Term Value and Impact of Actions on Others

### Objectives

- A** Discuss the long-term value and impact of actions on others.
- B** Demonstrate techniques to assess the long-term value and impact of actions on others.



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All of our actions have consequences. Sometimes, the consequences are minor.

So What

If you throw a rock into a pond, it will create ripples as it hits the surface. If you forget to wear your snow boots, you might slip on the ice and get a bruise or a scrape. Other times, the consequences are major. The tiniest spark from a campfire can set an entire forest ablaze. A split second of distraction while driving can cause an accident that alters people's lives forever. Sometimes, consequences are immediate, such as when you fail to study for a test and receive a bad grade. And other times, consequences don't become evident for a while. This might happen when you fail to exercise and your level of physical fitness decreases.

Your decisions and actions create an impact on both the present and the future. Learning to assess the long-term value of your actions and their effect on others is an important skill that everyone should develop.

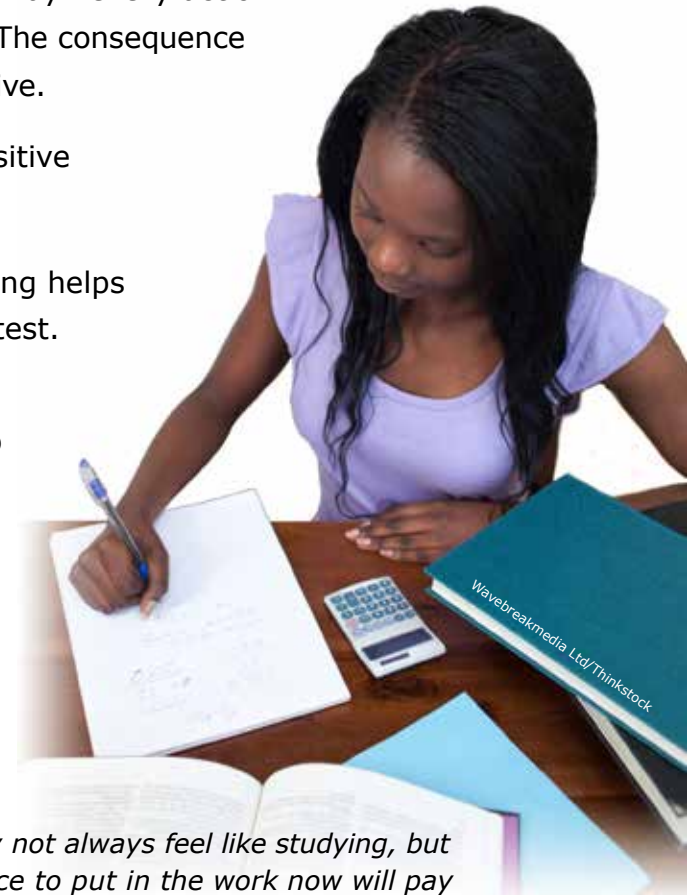
## For the Future

Each choice you make matters, and you want each to be **viable**. **Viability** refers to the long-term **value** of your choices. How do choices have value? Think of it this way—every action you take creates a **consequence**. The consequence may be positive, or it may be negative.



Examples of actions that create positive consequences:

- Spending an extra hour studying helps you earn a higher grade on a test.
- Making time for your younger sibling builds your relationship with her/him.
- Taking on an extra project at work contributes to you receiving a promotion.



▲ *You may not always feel like studying, but the choice to put in the work now will pay off in the end!*

These positive results don't just happen—you *make* them happen through your decisions and actions! On the flip side, however, your choices also have the power to create negative consequences.

Examples of actions that create negative consequences:

- Skipping soccer practice means that you are not allowed to play in the next game.
- Failing to fill your car up with gas results in getting stranded on the side of the road.
- Snapping at a customer ends in you receiving a reprimand from your manager.

As you can see, negative results don't just happen on their own either. Once you understand your role and responsibility in creating consequences, it's much easier for you to do two important things:

- Repeat the actions that create positive results.
- Avoid repeating the actions that create negative results.



▲ *A little planning and thinking ahead can save you from all kinds of unnecessary trouble.*

## Bigger than you

Each action you take creates a consequence that affects your life in some way—big or small. In addition to yourself, though, your actions also affect others. This includes parents, family members, friends, classmates, coworkers, strangers, and even people who haven't been born yet!



Check out this video from *Good Morning America* explaining how your individual actions affect climate change: <https://gma.yahoo.com/video/could-actions-affect-glacial-meltdown-124808399.html>.

Think about the actions and consequences we've already discussed and consider the impact they have on other people:

- Building a relationship with your sibling doesn't benefit just you—it enriches his/her life as well!
- Taking on an extra project at work may help relieve the stress of an overburdened coworker.
- Skipping soccer practice and missing the next game affects your entire team. Without you in the lineup, everyone may miss a shot at advancing to the regional tournament.
- Snapping at a customer not only gets you in trouble with your manager, it can also lose business for your company. And there's a good chance you might ruin the poor customer's day!

What are some other ways that your actions affect others?



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▲ Coworkers always appreciate someone who is willing to step in and help out when things get busy.

## The long haul

The consequences of your actions are not always immediate. Sometimes, you (and others) won't experience them until sometime in the future. Consider these examples:

- As a society, we can choose whether or not to conserve energy and recycle. No matter what we decide, we are creating consequences for future generations.
- You can choose to eat healthy or unhealthy foods. You can also choose whether or not to be active and physically fit. It might not make a big difference *today*, but over time, the consequences of your choices will become very clear.
- As soon as you begin working, you can begin saving money for your retirement. Investment allows your money to grow over time, and the sooner you start, the greater your opportunity is to create wealth for yourself and your family. Retirement may seem light-years away, but the choices you make early in your career will have a huge impact down the road.



It's human nature to prioritize the short term over the long term. Recycling isn't always convenient. Junk food tastes good, and exercise isn't always fun. It's much more appealing to spend money on our current wants and needs than to put it away for the future.

However, these short-term decisions and actions add up to long-term consequences—an unhealthy environment for the next generation, a weakened body unable to keep up with life's daily demands, the inability to enjoy a financially secure retirement, etc. When we understand the impact of our short-term choices, we can take the appropriate steps to ensure that the long-term results will be positive.



**D**an Ariely explains an experiment he conducted on short-term vs. long-term decisions and actions in his column “The Long-Term Effects of Short-Term Emotions.” You can read it here: <https://hbr.org/2010/01/column-the-long-term-effects-of-short-term-emotions>.

## It’s beneficial

When you learn to assess the long-term value and impact of your choices on others, you reap the following benefits:

- Becoming more **self-aware**—Self-awareness is understanding the influence and effect you have on others. Self-aware people don’t make choices without considering the impact those choices will have on other people. Self-awareness can be demonstrated in small ways, such as holding the door open for the person behind you or cleaning the microwave after you use it. It also applies to bigger issues, such as realizing that your family members count on you to be trustworthy or that the things you post on the Internet have the power to stay attached to your name for the rest of your life.



**A**re you self-aware? Steve Tobak’s article “Seven Signs You’re Not as Self-Aware as You Think” might help you figure out the answer! Read it at <http://www.inc.com/steve-tobak/7-signs-youre-not-as-self-aware-as-you-think.html>.

- Becoming a better observer of the world around you—When you’re concerned with how your actions will affect others, you’re less focused on yourself and more tuned in to your environment. You develop a greater ability to learn new things and recognize opportunities as they come along. For instance, you might notice that one of your classmates is struggling with the study material and offer your help.

- Cultivating better relationships—Assessing the long-term value and impact of your actions means that you’re concerned about the people around you. This kind of consideration helps your relationships grow and remain positive. If you consider your classroom behavior and make sure you’re not a distraction to others, you’ll have a positive relationship with your instructor and classmates. If you consider how your actions reflect on your parents/guardians and act accordingly, you’ll build their trust in you.
- Creating positive change—What kind of impact will you have, not only on those around you, but on the entire world? Think about people who have had enormous global impact, such as children’s and women’s rights activist Malala Yousafzai or business owner and philanthropist Bill Gates. They have assessed the long-term value of their actions, not only for themselves and their friends and family, but for *everyone*, including people who haven’t even been born yet. You may not have the same experiences as Malala or the same resources as Bill, but that doesn’t mean you can’t create positive change in the world. Understanding your power to influence others is a great place to start.



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- ▲ *Class is much more enjoyable for everyone when all participants are polite and engaged, rather than disruptive.*



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To learn more about Malala Yousafzai, visit <https://www.malala.org/malalas-story>.

To learn more about Bill Gates and the Gates Foundation, visit <http://www.gatesfoundation.org/>.

- Helping you to act more ethically—The ability to adhere to a code of **ethics** is a crucial life skill. When a person is ethical, s/he acts with honesty and **integrity** (high moral character). Considering the needs of others is an important part of ethical behavior. When you learn to assess the long-term value and impact of your actions, you're much more likely to act ethically at school, at work, and in life.



## What a letdown

When you fail to assess the long-term value and impact of your actions on others, you'll likely experience negative consequences, such as:

- Limiting your personal growth—Becoming aware of the viability of your choices is a sign of personal growth and maturity. If you refuse to do so, you shortchange yourself and may miss out on becoming the best version of *you*.





- Damaging your personal relationships—Not every action you take that has negative consequences is intended to cause harm. For example, there’s nothing wrong with planning a night out with your friends. But if you forget to invite someone from your regular group, s/he may be hurt. You didn’t mean to forget, but the result is still undesirable. However, if you make it a habit to be aware of how your actions affect others, you’ll be more likely to avoid these types of situations.
- Creating a negative impact on society—Imagine if everyone in a society acted in their own interests, or only for the short term. It would be chaos! When people assess the long-term value of their choices, it makes the world a better place to live. Every person makes her/his own impact on society. If you fail to consider the effect your actions have on others, your impact will likely be negative rather than positive.

## Summary

Viability refers to the long-term value of your choices. Every choice creates a consequence, either positive or negative, for you and for others. Some consequences are short term and others are long term. Once you understand your role and responsibility in creating consequences, you can take the appropriate actions to achieve the results you desire. Assessing the long-term value of your actions on others helps you become more self-aware, become a better observer of the world around you, cultivate better relationships, create positive change, and act more ethically. When you fail to do so, you limit your personal growth, risk damaging your personal relationships, and create a negative impact on society.

## TOTAL RECALL

1. What is viability?
2. What two main types of consequences do your actions create?
3. Understanding your role in creating consequences can help you do what two important things?
4. Whom do your actions affect?
5. Explain the relationship between short-term actions and long-term consequences.
6. What are the benefits of assessing the long-term value and impact of your actions on others?
7. What may happen if you fail to assess the long-term value and impact of your actions on others?

## THE GRAY ZONE

**Y**our actions create consequences, not only for yourself, but for others. The consequences may be positive, or they may be negative. If you're like most people, you want to create positive consequences and have a helpful influence on the world around you.

Is it okay, then, to participate in a questionable short-term activity to create a positive long-term result? For example, a nonprofit organization may try to solicit donations by playing heavily on potential donors' emotions—think of some of the television advertisements that feature graphic images of abused or neglected animals. Some people consider this unethical. However, the organization uses donations to do good work and create a great deal of positive change. What do you think? Does the end justify the means?

# Take Stock

Assessing the long-term value and impact of your actions on others is not a difficult task. It just requires your willingness to be thoughtful and purposeful as you go about your life. The following five steps will take you through the basic process:

## 1

STEP

### Think before you act.

Once you've acted, it's usually too late to take it back. There's a saying that you can't "unring a bell." If you decide to blow off the meeting for your group project and go to a movie instead, you might feel bad about it later, but it may be too late to save your group's grade. If you cause an accident by texting while driving, you'll certainly regret it, but you won't be able to undo any damage you've caused to people or property.



Car accidents are the number one cause of teen deaths in the United States, and nearly half of them can be attributed to distracted driving. Watch this video for more insight into this critical area in which you must think before you act:

<http://abcnews.go.com/GMA/video/study-reveals-distracted-driving-big-problem-teens-29890969>.

Acknowledge the power you possess to influence and affect other people through your actions. *Everyone* possesses this power! Next, check your intentions. What kind of impact are you trying to create? Visualize it! Determine that you will do what's necessary to turn your vision into a reality.

# 2

STEP

## Acknowledge your own knowledge gaps and biases.

A **knowledge gap** is simply something you don't know. Perhaps a friend tries to talk to you about horse racing, and you're clueless on the subject. You have a knowledge gap! Knowledge gaps can affect your choices and actions as well. When you step into a voting booth, your choices will depend on how much knowledge you've collected about each issue or candidate on the ballot. The more knowledge you have, the better!

A **bias** is a prejudice you have either for or against something. Bias isn't always a bad thing. For instance, you may prefer chocolate ice cream to vanilla, or you may hate watching horror movies. Other times, bias can be very detrimental—such as when you look down on someone because of her/his race or gender. Everyone has biases, and they influence our choices and actions.

No one is perfect. *Everyone* has knowledge gaps and biases. What's important is to acknowledge them and not allow them to influence your choices in negative ways. You will certainly make mistakes from time to time. Learning to assess the long-term impact of your actions on others is a process. You must allow yourself to grow and mature along the way.



▲ *Voting is an important responsibility that affects your community, so being informed is essential. Use online resources to learn about the issues and candidates before you vote!*

# 3

STEP

## Determine the needs of others.

Think of everyone who will be affected by your choices and actions. Depending on the situation, it could be any number of people, from your parents/guardians to your siblings to your friends to a stranger you pass on the sidewalk.

Determine who will be influenced the *most* by the decision at hand. Different people have different needs and should be treated differently, even in similar situations. Let's say you have a 12-year-old sister and a five-year-old sister. Both of them ask you for help with their art projects. You will likely give your older sister more constructive criticism and instruction than you will your younger sister because your older sister is more capable of understanding it. What are some other situations in which it would be appropriate to treat two people differently?



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▲ *Take some time to brainstorm and write down all people who might be affected by your choices.*

# 4

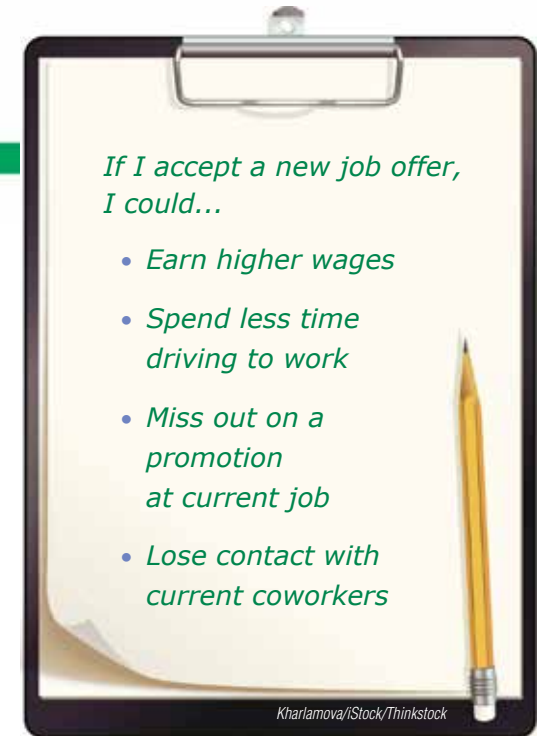
STEP

## List potential outcomes for your choices.

Before you choose or act, consider the potential outcomes. Sometimes, you may have time to actually write them out and think them over for a period of time, such as when you're choosing a college or deciding between two job offers. Other times, you'll need to make a quick decision on your feet.

Think about how your potential actions will affect both you and others. For example, if you decide not to lifeguard at the local pool this summer, will your boss have trouble finding a replacement? Will your friends miss working with you? Will you have more time to spend with your family before going off to school in the fall? Will you be able to take a job that pays more money?

Listing the potential outcomes won't always lead you to a clear *right* choice, but it will certainly help. When in doubt, you can always ask a mentor or someone you trust for insight and guidance.



If you want a visual representation of the potential outcomes of a certain action, you can use a free brainstorming or mind-mapping tool such as the one available at <https://bubbl.us/>. There's even a smartphone app!

# 5

STEP

## Don't take shortcuts.

The easy choice isn't always the right choice. But if your goal is to create a positive, long-term impact on others through your actions, you'll prioritize making the right choice over any short-term advantages you may gain. When you see the results of your efforts, you'll be happy you didn't take any shortcuts.

Understanding and following these five steps will go a long way toward ensuring the long-term viability of your actions. The process isn't difficult. You just have to be willing to commit to thoughtfulness, self-awareness, and concern for others. These are qualities *everyone* should aspire to develop!



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▲ *Envisioning the long-term effects of your choices can sometimes feel like trying to see your destination at the beginning of a journey.*



## Summary

To assess the long-term value and impact of your actions on others, use the following process: Think before you act, acknowledge your own knowledge gaps and biases, determine the needs of others, list potential outcomes for your choices, and don't take shortcuts.

### TOTAL RECALL

1. Briefly describe the following steps in the process of assessing the long-term value and impact of your actions on others:
  - a. Think before you act.
  - b. Acknowledge your own knowledge gaps and biases.
  - c. Determine the needs of others.
  - d. List potential outcomes for your choices.
  - e. Don't take shortcuts.