

Turning Hindrances into Advantages

Using the wisdom of a Roman emperor

to find and accelerate along your path today

A Fork In The Path

The lights across the inlet bounced along the darkened water and met my tearful eyes.

Yes, I would leave this solid, comfortable family home I'd dreamed of over twenty years, designed and finally built. But, I had become a servant to my own house.

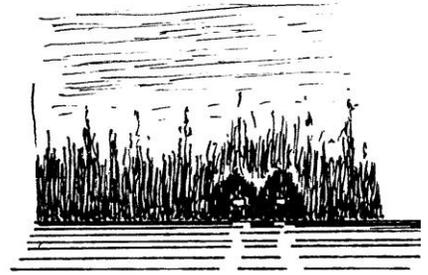
The dream house had begun to feel like an anchor that tied me to values and responsibilities that were out of alignment with what my family and I needed.

While we were in the dream house, we started noticing that we were spending money in ways that were uncomfortable, we felt stress about our kid's identity with such privilege and luxury, the ongoing demands of mortgage and upkeep that required more time than I wanted to spend away from my young family. The common source of all these concerns was the house. The obstacle to our peaceful enjoyment of life was all that the house demanded of us. When we realized that releasing our grip on the house would open up many fresh opportunities, the path forward became clear.

We'd wrestled with all the obstacles and frustrations for over a year and concluded that what we were trying to avoid, giving up on the dream home/life, was actually our path forward. It was time to let go of that dream and move on.

The decision was made; we'd sell and take the path leading toward a life more aligned with our values but also full of unknowns.

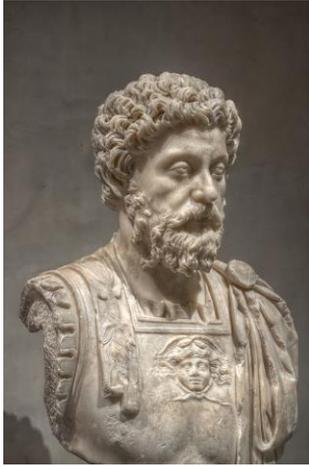
At that moment, I wish I had known that a Roman emperor had faced a similar moment over 1,800 years earlier while he was making risky choices as his Roman Legions battled the Germanic tribes in Pannonia (modern Croatia.) . I imagine him sitting by the light of an oil lamp in his tent writing his learnings about how to make decisions in ambiguous, risky situations.



*When your ship, long moored in harbor,
gives you the illusion of being a house...
put out to sea!*

*Save your boat's journeying soul,
and your own pilgrim soul,
cost what it may.*

- Brazilian Archbishop Camaro



Our actions may be impeded by [circumstances], but there can be no impeding our intentions or our dispositions. Because we can accommodate and adapt. The mind adapts and converts to its own purposes the obstacle to our acting.

The impediment to action advances action.

What stands in the way becomes the way.

Marcus Aurelius, Meditations Book V paragraph 20

Wisdom Jigs: Great Ideas In Action

I've built Marcus Aurelius' method of thinking through decisions into a simple thinking tool I call a Wisdom Jig.

A Wisdom Jig is a way of learning and practicing a method of thinking built on proven wisdom. Like a woodworking jig, the pre-designed structure of the wisdom jig holds all the pieces in proper relationship through a process that yields precise results quickly and consistently.

Using This Wisdom Jig to Define a New Path Forward

The process of looking closely at all our obstacles and their deeper source made the path back to better alignment with our values very clear; for us the obstacles helped clarify the way.

On the next page, you will find a Wisdom Jig designed to structure your thinking about the path you desire and obstacles and opportunities along the way.

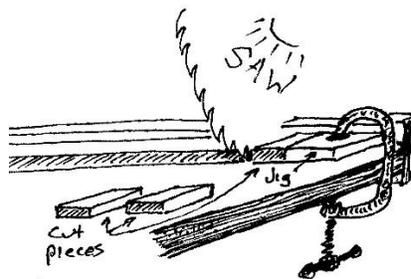


Figure 1: A Simple Woodworking Jig

Decision and Action Planner Wisdom Jig

A. The intention or what you want

B. Obstacles to success or sources of potential failure	C. Actions that would minimize or remove these obstacles or failure sources	D. Actions that would restore you to your core values

[Download a one page pdf jig to print here](#)

Detailed Steps:

1. First, commit to thinking longer and more deeply than you normally would; set aside some time, remove yourself from distractions, and intentionally think more courageously, more creatively, and harder than you would normally.
2. Think about the path you desire to take. Reverse your normal thinking to approach the idea from the direction of “Of course I would do this, why wouldn’t I?” This shifts the burden of rationalization from “why” you want to “why not” do it? This allows you to follow your desire while using this Wisdom Jig to realistically think through how to minimize the risks of doing so. This provides you both the energy of following your desires and the prudence of thoughtfully managing your risks.
3. Describe the path that you want to follow in the top grey box. Invest a couple of minutes in making this sentence clear, complete and compelling to you.
4. In column B, list all the negative outcomes you can imagine from doing what you want to. Number each one.
5. When you think you are out of ideas, review the list again and think for another 30 seconds before moving on.
6. Review column B and star the top three to five risks in terms of their negative impacts and likelihood.
7. In column C, for the first item in column B, write actions you could take to minimize the possibility of that negative outcome actually happening.
8. In column D, list actions you could take to return to an acceptable condition or the status quo IF those risks came to pass and you faced the worst case of that potential pitfall.

Make it real

Calendar the time to take the first steps toward your goal and toward eliminating the risks you face. Do this now, before you lose the clarity you’ve just worked so hard to create.

Set an appointment with yourself to review all your risks and potential pitfalls to be sure you are working to eliminate each one.

Set check in meetings with yourself on your calendar now for two and four weeks from now to re-assess the risks, rewards, and actions. The agenda for these progress assessment meetings with yourself should include:

1. Evaluation of your listed and new risks
2. A review of your listed and new potential rewards
3. Your actions to date
4. Your actions still to come - is your list and its priority still relevant or in need of revision?
5. Write down what you have learned in the process so far.
6. Revise your plans as necessary to reduce your risks and to reach your goals.
7. Add any new tasks and review meetings your calendar before calling your meeting complete

8. Review your risks. Get clear about when you need to swing into action on your column D plans for returning to the status quo/acceptable conditions if your worst-case scenarios are coming to pass despite your best efforts.

Now, set to work on the first steps toward your desired outcome! Check out site for others Wisdom Jigs to help you along the way including the Critical Path and Constraints jigs.

If this Wisdom Jig opened questions in your heart and mind, we'd enjoy talking with you about your experiences and your path forward. Set up a consultation [here](#).

Thank you for sharing this Wisdom Jig,



Stephen Sloan and the Wisdom Jigs team

Learn a lot more about our work with Wisdom Jigs & our Leadership Coaching [here](#)

Other resources for further study:

Introduction to the Meditations and their context:

<http://www.iep.utm.edu/marcus/>

A talk on applied Stoicism by Ryan Holliday

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e2Zq2VWvmW4>

Nobel laureate Daniel Kahneman - using a premortem to eliminate thinking biases

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MzTNMalfyhM>

Begin - to begin is half the work, let half still remain; again, begin this, and thou wilt have finished.

Marcus Aurelius