

# WHEN CONFRONTED WITH CHANGE, WHICH WILL YOU CHOOSE?

You always have 3 options. Which one is right for you?

By Harland Merriam, October 12, 2020



## THREE CHOICES, THREE DOORS

You are confronted with a substantial change in your life. What will you do?

You have only three real options. If these three doors were those options, which would you choose?

Door #1 is the choice to stand still. You may choose to not move at all. Sometimes this is appropriate. Before taking action -- stop and consider and then decide.

Door #2 is a decision to move backward. In the military we call this a retreat, a tactical withdrawal. Taking a step back may be your wisest move. See a move backward as a way to regroup, to find a safer place from which to make your next move.

Door #3 is moving forward. (Or to the right or left.) Step toward your destination. Step into that new chapter in your life, into your new future.

All three choices can be appropriate.

Which is the right one to help you navigate the change in your life. From time to time the first two types of moves may be necessary. But, the move forward is the most effective for actually taking you from where you are and to where you want to be.

## CHOICE #1: STAND STILL

Standing still may be the right move.

To describe a move as “standing still” sounds like a contradiction. But sometimes the best move is no move at all.

The best move might be a pause!

Kind of like this lizard on the step, who is thinking to herself: *“Hmmm. Do I go up, go back down, sit here and rest? Let me see.”* She pauses to get her bearings.



Victor Frankl speaks about the gap between a stimulus and our response. Whether for a micro-second or a lot longer, we have a gap. Use it. It might be wise for you to make no overt physical movement at all for a while.

In other words, choose to pause and then respond, rather than to react in the moment.

In this gap, however long, engage your mind, your heart, your gut before you take any step. Think through the situation, the consequences of your various choices, get in touch with your deepest desires, consider the result you wish to achieve.

**To stand still may be a particularly good choice.**

I know several leaders who wisely chose to do nothing when Covid-19 threatened their businesses. They chose to pause. They chose not to react out of fear or panic. They gathered their team and considered their options. Only then did they decide on a path forward. Only then did they take action on their new plan.

When the stock market dropped so quickly in March 2020, wise investors simply paused. They did not sell based on fear. They looked at the situation and chose an appropriate response.

Standing still, pausing, before responding is often a sign of wisdom.

Not everyone demonstrates this wisdom. Many people react, rather than respond. They allow their habits or emotions to control them. They say things and do things before they have engaged their deeper self.

Has a too-quick reaction ever gotten you into trouble? Have you ever wished you could take back what you just said, get a do-over on what you just did?

A Jewish teacher I have come to know often pauses before acting. He took 40 days one time for his pause. When he was most stressed he would get up early before anyone else and spend time in prayer. Only after such a pause would he act.

Standing still may be the right move, perhaps the best move in your circumstance. Choose Door #1 – do not move. It might be for a split second. Might be for a moment or two or longer.

*“Let me think about it,”* we might say. *“I’ll pray about that,”* some of us would decide.

**Engage your mind, your heart, and your gut during this pause before you act.**

Your mind might bring up previous experiences, allow you to think about possible consequences, provide an opportunity to consider various approaches...

Your heart might have you recognize your core values, so what you eventually decide to do will be right for you. Your heart might put you in touch with the principles that are important to you. When you listen to your heart you allow your emotions to speak to you.

Your gut would have you listen to your body and to that inner voice within you. Allow your gut to speak to you. Tap into the mysterious reality called instinct.

**This pause may also provide you the opportunity to link up with others to gain from their more objective perspective.**

The two guys in this picture are supporting, listening, encouraging each other. You do not have to go it alone. Draw on others during the pause.



And, of course, for those of us who are people of faith, we know how helpful it is to consult with the Holy Spirit, with Scripture as we make decisions, before we take action.

I think of the prodigal son, who paused before he acted. He was thinking about making a change from his terrible condition and returning home to his father. He probably wished he had paused earlier in his life. This time he did pause. He considered his situation and his options. He thought them through, and then chose the one that would best get him to where he wanted to be.

**Now, a warning about standing still!**

We can overdo the pause. Doing nothing doesn’t get results. You and I both know sometimes we are simply spinning our wheels, not getting any traction, stuck, frozen. Has this ever happened to you?

The pause goes on and on and on and on... We get nowhere.

Take a look inside. Has fear taken over? Or maybe it is shame or guilt. These are powerful forces. They often control us become huge roadblocks to progress in our lives.

That man and woman in the Garden of Eden allowed one (or all three) of these to control them. So, they hid.

I remember a time when I needed to go ahead and make a decision and act. Doing nothing just made things worse for me and for the others in my life. But I was afraid. Fear kept me from acting in a timely manner. And I paid for the delay. Sound familiar?

**The key is to pause for just the right amount of time.** Each situation will determine how long this is, but when it goes on and on, something else is controlling us, wouldn't you agree? During the pause, take a look and see if it is fear or something that has a hold on you. Decide in to step into and overcome your fear.

So, choice #1, to stand still is an excellent choice, if only for a moment. It has its place.

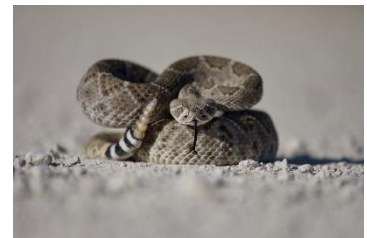
Pause and receive information from your mind, your heart, your gut, from others, from God. The more aware we are of all these sources of information, the better equipped we are to make an informed decision and have confidence to move forward (or backward).

## CHOICE #2: MOVE BACKWARD

The second choice is a movement backward to a safer place. It may be the current change has triggered something in you from your past, something that needs to be worked through before you can move on.

A temporary step back may be the most courageous choice of the three.

If you were out walking and saw this rattle snake in front of you, what would you do? You would take a step back. Right?



If you have an issue or experience or trauma from your past, find someone to assist you in working through it. Before we can navigate certain changes in our life, we might need to seek therapy. Nothing wrong with that.

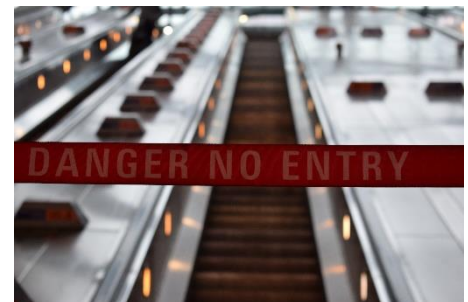
Each of us has stuff in our lives, stuff that holds us back, holds us down. Through the years, I have sought trained professionals to help me work through this stuff in my life. Perhaps you will, too. Step back. Take care of that stuff. Then we will be able to move on.

Sometimes the emotions have too much energy. We are too sad, too angry, too drained, too whatever. The best thing to do would be to take a step back into a safer place.

A friend told me he was recently in such a situation. The conversation had become uncomfortable. He and the others were raising their voices. Wisely, he caught himself and said, *"I need to take a step back. Excuse me for a moment. I am going to go take a walk. I'll be back."*

Sometimes the circumstances have turned from green to yellow to red. The dangers are too high. The wise thing to do when confronted by this "Danger. No Entry" sign is to stop, back up, even turn around and find another way.

Take that step back if you need to. Work through the things that are triggering you. Find a safe place where you can think more clearly. This step back may open up more possibilities for your eventual step forward.



I visited with a friend who owns a small business here in DeLand. He used the Covid-19 circumstances as his opportunity to liquidate his business and sell his building. He did so deliberately, a huge step backwards. This gave him the option to consolidate his equity. It opened up new possibilities for bold new steps into the future. He had a big smile on his face as he reflected on the very positive result from his step back.

Peter, after he had denied Jesus three times retreated into self-pity, remorse, guilt. He was seeking a safe space. No doubt, he was able to take a good hard look at his life in that step back. And then Jesus sought him out to bring him back and give him the ability to step forward into his purpose again.

**Before you can use that pause, you may need to move backwards to find a safe space.**

I have taken a step backward in my life, sometimes several steps backward. Only then could I gain the perspective I needed to move forward.

In the military, a deliberate retreat is a pro-active move to the rear. A retreat can provide the time to regroup, to find a better place for resuming the offense.

**And there are dangers in a retreat as well.** It can be overdone. A retreat can turn into a defeat. If we are honest, some of our back stepping is simply a way to avoid situations or people that need to be addressed.

Again, it may be fear or shame or guilt that holds us back from doing what we need to do.

I tend to go quiet when I find myself in conflict. This is a form of taking a step back. I can also find myself stuck in quiet mode. Ever happen to you?

Eventually we need to move forward, don't we?

We have explored two of our choices – standing still and taking a step back. Now, let us look at the third, which is the one that achieves the results we are seeking.

### **CHOICE #3: MOVE FORWARD**

The third choice is to take a step forward (or to the right or left).

Remember when Alice of Alice in Wonderland asks the Cheshire Cat which way she should go. Before he answered, the Cheshire Cat asked Alice where she was going. Alice said she did not know, did not care, so the Cat answered, then it does not matter which way you go.

One of the purposes for the pause (Choice #1) is to get clear about where you are headed. Without a clear sense of direction, a step forward has no purpose.

A step back may give us some perspective or open up new routes toward our goal. When we are clear about our destination, then the time has come to act.

If you know where you are going, then start moving forward in the direction of your desire.

As Yogi Berra said, *"When you come to a fork in the road, take it."* Yes, do take the path that will get you to your destination.

The problem with taking a step forward is knowing that it is the right path, that it will get us there.

Sometimes simply taking that step forward, even if not totally sure if this is the right move, will begin to open your future to you.

You may need simply to step forward so you are better able to see far enough ahead to know if you are on the right path. You will not gain that perspective until you take a few steps forward.

Back in 1972, I was not sure that I wanted to go into ministry. But Barbara and I decided to take a step. We packed up a U-Haul and headed to Princeton Seminary. It was not until the end of my first year of study that I was confident this was the right decision. But I would not have known that without risking that first step forward.

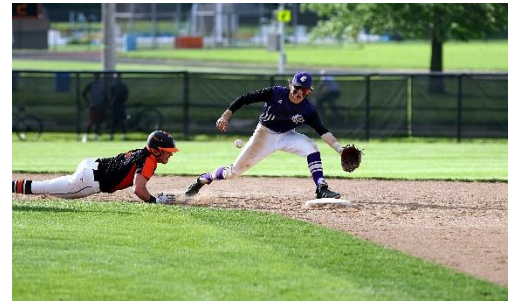
Isaiah hears God's call and says, "Here am I, send me." He is willing to commit to the first step. (Isaiah 6)

Abraham and Sarah step out when they hear God say to them "Go to the place that I will show you." (Genesis 12)

Sonali Lamba, the CEO of Brideside, a thriving business selling dresses to brides, decided to close all her physical stores when Covid-19 hit. She processed through all three options. She paused. Then she took a step backwards. Then, after meeting with her team, she decided to step forward in a new direction, to sell her dresses virtually. It was a risky step. And one that achieved results. Within weeks she was making more from her online business than she ever did from her physical stores.

Both players in this baseball picture to the right have taken a step. Neither are sure if their step is the right one.

It may be the guy playing first base misses the ball, which would have meant it would have been better for the runner to have gone on to second base. But both used the information they had available at the time. Sometimes we just have to act.



The game of baseball and the game of life call on us to act, to take a step, even if we aren't sure it is the right one.

After an appropriate pause or even taking a step back and doing some psychological work, take that step forward. If you have stepped back to get to a safer place, pause there for a moment and then take that step forward. The only choice that actually gets us to our destination is that step forward.

**Please note, the danger in stepping out too soon.** Remember the dangers of being reactive. Action can be unthought, too automatic, too quick. As the saying goes, "Fools rush in..." Make sure your action is deliberate and it is more likely to be effective.

Review the reasons for that pause or that step backward. Then make a choice and act intentionally.

In another article, I have noted the 4 first key steps for navigating change. The first letters of the steps spell the word R.E.A.L. They are

1. **R**ecognize that you are experiencing change,
2. **E**mbrace the change,
3. **A**ct Intentionally, and
4. **L**ink Up with others as you navigate that change.

Step into your future!

## CONCLUSION

You have three choices when you are confronted with a transition in your life.

You can do nothing, stand still, pause.

You can take a step backward, retreat to a safer space.

Or you can take that deliberate step forward

Which will it be?

That is the challenge of navigating change. Embrace the change and take an appropriate action. Pause or take a step back for a time, then take that step forward.

The hiker in the picture wants to get to the other side. He has decided to go ahead and step out onto the bridge.

For nearly five decades, I have been walking alongside people as they have faced the inevitable changes in their life.



Some of these changes were professional in nature. Some were very personal. Some of these changes they brought on themselves. Others were thrust on them. Some crept up on them slowly. Others burst into their lives suddenly, creating chaos and turbulence.

I've walked alongside people starting a new business, dealing with the death of a loved one, confronting a major relationship change, getting married, expanding, stepping into a promotion, arriving at retirement ...

They were able to reach inside themselves to discover the choice that was best for them. With support, they were able to tap into their own inner strength. They found the courage to take the step they needed to take. They successfully moved into the future they desired. They achieved the results they wanted for their life.

**So can you!**

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