

## It's All About the Choices ...

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Making choices is difficult at the best of times, and that drives many people to avoid making any choice. Instead, they hope for two completely different realities to exist at the same time, even though deep down they know that's impossible. Leadership, especially leadership in our own lives, is about realizing there are trade-offs in every choice, but that making a choice is always better than not making one.

You can choose to have money in the bank, or you can choose to have nice things, but most people can't afford to have a lot of both. You can choose to be really smart, you can choose to be really fit, or you can choose to spend a lot of time with family, but for most of us, there are simply not enough hours in the day available to devote ourselves to excelling at all three. Life is about choices. Whenever you choose to focus on one thing, something else will get less attention. What you choose is based on your values.

I think the most striking example of someone not realizing they couldn't have it all came just a few hours after I released a rural community development report. I had traveled to hundreds of communities over a few years to write a strategy for community building. I had interviewed hundreds of people individually and at group meetings. One person stood out to me. She was worried about her community. She wanted the school to stay open. She wanted the hospital to remain open. She wanted businesses to make money, taxes to stay low, and services to continue to grow. Her concern was typical of the people I met, and she was a passionate and loud spokesperson. I released my report. She was the second person who called me.

She was angry about my recommendations. One of them stated that since the highway went both ways, people in the city could travel to our rural hospitals for services. We had space in the hospitals, unused operating rooms, and no lineups. Physicians and surgeons could use the space to relieve pressure on urban hospitals, a solution that was more immediate than waiting years and spending billions on a new hospital in the city. I also thought that it would boost our rural economies, since those traveling people would spend money in shops and restaurants, and discover just how amazing our rural communities were. It might just influence some to consider making one of those communities home.

She called to specifically tell me that she didn't want city people coming out to rural communities. It would mean more of those city folks would realize how wonderful life could be in those rural communities. It would mean more traffic. They would come out to holiday after their medical stay. They would buy houses. They would crowd the place up. Her last words to me were, "I don't want them coming out here, period!"

I was dumbfounded. My final response to her was, "How do you expect me to keep the school open, the hospital open, the businesses successful, taxes low, and services expanding if you don't attract new people to the community somehow? You can't have both." There was a long silence and then she hung up. She realized she couldn't have it both ways, but she didn't want to think about that. She didn't want it to be a choice.

There are a lot of those types of mindsets that plague our communities and create challenges for those trying to make them successful. They want tourism dollars and community growth, but they don't want new developments that will lead to more traffic, noise, or anything that will disturb naturally beautiful

landscapes. Yet tourism is prone to develop around naturally beautiful landscapes. So, do you want community growth and tourism development, or nothing to disturb the tranquility? You can't have both.

There are choices that pit services against taxes, choices that pit municipal autonomy against regional competitiveness, choices that pit food security against land owner autonomy, and choices that pit preparing for the future against celebrating the past. There are hundreds of choices that we, and our communities, face every day. The choices are not always easy to make, but avoiding the reality that you face a choice at every turn is not going to make your community stronger or better.

Embrace the opportunity to choose your own destiny, and embrace the consequences of that choice. Accept that you will be trading something away for something you choose to want more, and get on with becoming who you and your community decide to be.

*This syndicated content is provided by Doug Griffiths, best-selling author and chief community builder at 13 Ways, a company with a mission to push communities to face their challenges to find their unique path to success. For more information visit [www.13ways.ca](http://www.13ways.ca), or we can start the conversation at [info@13ways.ca](mailto:info@13ways.ca).*