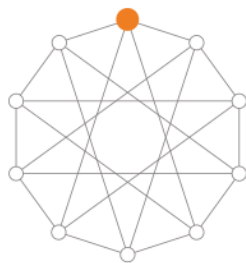


Turning Hindrances Into Advantages

*Using the wisdom of a Roman emperor to identify
and minimize risk at forks in your path*

A Wisdom Jig from



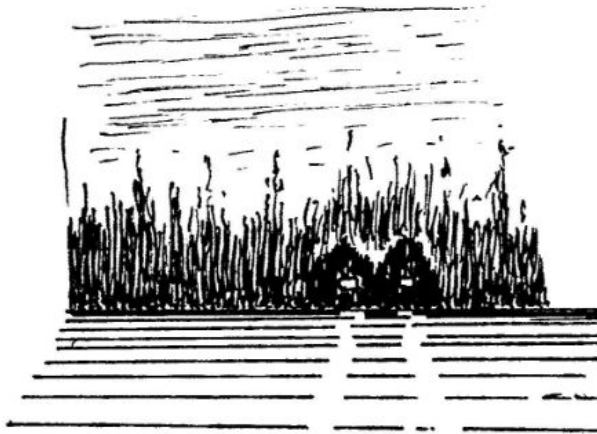
Humane
Leadership
Institute

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 for over twenty years, designed and finally built.

I had become a servant to my own house.



*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 Helder Camara

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 this house, we started noticing that we were spending money in ways that were uncomfortable and out of character. We felt stress about our kids' identification with such privilege and the ongoing demands of a 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.

We'd wrestled with all the 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 and move on.

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

At that moment, I wish I had known that a Roman emperor had had a similar insight over 1,800 years earlier while 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 about how to make decisions in ambiguous, risky situations.



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*

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 us revise and clarify our desires and our next steps.

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.

Turning Hindrances into Advantages Wisdom Jig

A. What you want and what you will gain by it		
B. Hindrances, negative outcomes	C. Actions you could take to minimize the possibility of the negative outcome happening	D. Possible actions to solve for the worst possible outcome and return to status quo

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 and ask yourself, "Of course I would do this, why wouldn't I?" This shifts the burden of rationalization from "why" you want what you want to "why not" do it? This allows you to follow your desire while thinking through how to manage the risks of doing so.
3. Describe the path that you want to follow and the outcomes you desire in the top box (A). 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

Using your action steps from columns B and C, 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, gains, 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 gains
3. Your actions to date
4. Your actions still to come - is your list and its priorities 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 to 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 other wisdom jigs to help you along the way.

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

— Marcus Aurelius

If this wisdom jig opened questions in your heart and mind, we'd enjoy talking with you about your experiences and your path forward. Please visit our website and fill out our [contact form](#).

Further reading

- Introduction to the Meditations and their context:
<http://www.iep.utm.edu/marcus/>
- A talk on Stoic Optimism by Ryan Holiday
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e2Zq2VWvmW4>
- Nobel laureate Daniel Kahneman on performing a “premortem” to eliminate thinking biases
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MzTNMalfyhM>

Thank you for sharing this wisdom jig,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steph". The letters are fluid and connected, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.