By Julie Desmond
julie@insightnews.com

Left or right? Big Mac or Chalupa? Snooze or not snooze? Daily life is all choices. Generally, people navigate without agonizing over decisions they've made or even that they did make a decision. But occasionally, people are faced with red light situations: stop-and-think choices that will impact the direction of one (or many) lives.

While marriage, genetic testing for diseases and some spending decisions rank pretty high on the impact scale, our focus here is career planning, so we'll keep our conversation around that. Which brings to mind the first rule in career planning decision making: this is not a genetic test, marriage or purchase of a Lamborghini. A career planning mistake is rarely catastrophic. When deciding where to go next in your career, keep your perspective in check.

When Abid gave two weeks' notice to his employer, he received a lucrative counter offer that included more money, more vacation and a promise that all his workplace issues would go away. Until it was time to transition his work to other people, his employer had had no concept of how valuable Abid was to the organization. Nor had he noticed that Abid's complaints had some merit.

Scientific studies and my own recruiting experience have proven that anyone who takes a counter offer will be looking for something new within about six months, either because they were replaced or because what made them look the first time has again raised its ugly head. But Abid felt certain that his employer's intentions were on the up and up. So he had a decision to make: take the offer or leave it?

Abid talked to dozens of people within and outside of his current company. He worked through his feelings about what had gone wrong and what it would take to fix it. He made lists of pros and cons, lists of possible outcomes, lists of other lists he should be making. After all that, the final exercise Abid needs to walk through is, though not easy, very straightforward.

He needs to decide: What do I want today? "I" is a keyword here. If the only person in the equation is Abid, what does Abid want? Not Mrs. Abid, not coworkers, clients or friends. What is best for Abid today? That answer has to be concrete and it should be written down or said aloud. Hearing something said out loud can change the thought entirely.

Next, Abid should decide, What will I want in three months? And finally, in one year and in five years, what will be the best place for me? Once these answers are solidified, the go-for-it decision will be clear.

Every step up those crystal career stairs can be tentative. Make the best decision you can make at this time, and it will lead to other right decisions up ahead.

Julie Desmond is Talent Manager for Express Employment Professionals and Lake Region Staffing. Write to julie@lakeregionstaffing.com .