

**Lifeline exercise – decision making**

This exercise provides you with an opportunity to review significant decisions you have made in the past to help you make decisions about your future.

**Method**

Think about how you have made important decisions in the past: for example, career-related decisions about A-level subjects, applying for medical school, specialty/training choices etc, or personal decisions that are unrelated to work, such as taking a gap year between school and university, starting or ending a significant personal relationship, or relocating.

Then, follow the instructions below. Figure 1 below provides an example.

1. Take a sheet of paper, ideally A3 or flip-chart paper. Turn it round so that it is landscape rather than portrait.
2. Draw a horizontal line across the middle of the paper. Note down your age at the right-hand end of the line. Then, put in a 'plus' (+) above the horizontal line (to signify times that you look back on with pleasure) and a 'minus' (-) below the line (to signify those times when things were not going well).
3. Before you go any further, think very carefully about the course the line will take. Where are the high points and the low points? Which parts of the line (if any) are relatively stable?
4. Now mark in the significant life events. Include experiences that influenced your achievements, and both good and bad events that have occurred in your life to date. Allow yourself sufficient space, as including one event may trigger a memory of another.
5. Connect up the points that you have marked.
6. Identify a couple of decisions that you have marked on your Lifeline which you feel (in retrospect) have worked out well. What made them good decisions? How did you go about making these particular decisions?
7. Now, identify a couple of decisions on your lifeline that you feel (in retrospect) didn't work out so well? What made them poorer decisions? How did you approach these decisions that didn't work out so well?

Can you use this analysis of decisions to throw any light on how you should approach the career choices that you are currently facing?

One way of doing this is to look at your answers to questions 6 and 7 in order to identify the best way for you to approach your current decision, as well as approaches you should avoid. For example, do you seem to be somebody who makes good decisions when you rely on your 'gut' feelings, or are you somebody who has made your best decisions when you adopt a more structured approach?

Has anything else struck you from completing this Lifeline exercise?

Taken from *The Roads to Success* – Elton, C and Reid J, 2008