

Can Ben Franklin really help you decide?



Recently, I've become hooked on those house hunter programs where a couple has to decide which residence they are going to purchase. Conveniently, they make this major decision within the 20 minutes of programming. You know the format – one is usually moved-in ready, one has great potential and one is over their budget. Just before the last commercial break, the couple will eliminate one and then you're in suspense regarding the final two.

I must admit, being a voyeur to this kind of decision making process can be baffling. Each of the couple starts off with their own set of criteria, expectations and list of must-haves, but eventually both will come to settle on a property that's less than ideal but meets a ***“core need.”***

When making a decision, probably the most difficult part is getting past the list of wants, needs and desires and getting to the ***“core need”*** – that critical factor that will give you peace of mind, a sense of satisfaction and a feeling that resonates with who you are. At the same time it also says, I can forego all the other things I thought were important.

Ben Franklin's list of Pros and Cons represents one kind of decision making strategy. However, not everyone knows that his division of into the reasons for and against something was far more sophisticated.

Franklin's genius was to add two additional layers. Once the pros and cons were listed, each was further rated for its **importance** and then for its **probability** (meaning likelihood of happening).

Here's an abbreviated example of my own. I can't decide if I should go to a conference where I would have to fly or stay home and purchase the video recordings.

One of my pro reasons for going is that I will make a number of networking contacts besides getting the information live.

One of my con reasons is that flying has become a hassle. The last time I flew my plane sat on the tarmac for 2 hours and I missed my connecting flight.

If I rate from one to 10 in ascending value for *importance*, I personally would rate in favor of going as an "8" and for not going as an "8". I'm at a draw here.

If I rate from one to 10 in ascending value for *probability*, I personally would rate the likelihood of getting something out of networking a "6" (I'm not great at networking) and for the likelihood of a bad flying experience a "4" (since I can rationalize allocating more time for travel).

If I multiply my scores: In favor of going for the value of networking (8×6) is a 48, or in favor or not going because of the possible inconvenience of flying (8×4) is a 32. My higher score of 48 tells me, even though I not great at networking, I could get greater value out of going rather than worrying about problems with flying.

Now, of course there would be a number of other factors besides these two, but this gives you an idea of how unique Franklin's approach was to decision making, and maybe one of the reasons he's on the face of our 100 dollar bills.

The key is probing deeper into the reasons we put forth as our original list of criteria, expectations and list of must-haves and what comes down to our core need.

You can try this yourself, and there is even a website that has an easy template list for you to use at

<http://www.proconlists.com> (click on Create a List).

Try it out and let me know how it works for you.