

A Tale of Two Decisions:

An Exercise in Noticing What Moves Us

In *Leadership Begins on the Inside*, we explored the idea that leadership is shaped from the inside out—that every decision flows from an inward center, whether we are aware of it or not. This brief exercise is simply an invitation to pause and look at that center for yourself, by reflecting on real decisions and the motives behind them. It is not about fixing or defining anything, but about beginning with honest attention.

Set aside 20 minutes. Choose a time when you can be **undistracted**—no phone, no notifications, no interruptions.

This exercise is **completely private**. You are not sharing it with a group. No one will read it but you. The value comes from **total personal honesty**, not polish or insight. And there are no right answers.

What This Is (and Is Not)

- This is not about fixing yourself.
- It is not about self-criticism or self-improvement.
- It is not about deciding your purpose, direction, or “mission.”

This is simply an opportunity to **look inward**—to notice what actually moves you when you act.

Every outward decision flows from an inward center, whether we attend to it or not. This exercise is a first step in noticing that center.

The Exercise

You will reflect on **two real decisions** from your life:

1. One decision that turned out **well**
2. One decision that turned out **poorly**

Do not overthink your choices. Pick decisions that were real, concrete, and involved some level of responsibility or consequence.

Why Do this Exercise?

If you want to become a more effective leader, you have to begin where leadership actually starts. Every decision you make—especially under pressure—is shaped by motives, fears, desires, and assumptions that operate beneath the surface.

When those interior forces go unnoticed, leadership becomes reactive rather than deliberate.

This exercise is a simple way to slow down and pay attention to what is already moving you, so that your future decisions can be made with greater clarity, coherence, and integrity.

Decision One: A Good Outcome

Step 1 — Recall the Situation

Briefly describe the decision.

- What was happening at the time?
- What did you have to decide?
- What was at stake?
- What pressures, constraints, or expectations were present?

Keep this factual. No analysis yet.

Step 2 — Examine Your Motive

First, slow down: At the moment you made this decision—before you knew how it would turn out—what was driving you? Ask yourself quietly:

- What did I want?
- What was I trying to protect, preserve, or avoid?
- What fear, desire, or conviction was most active?
- What mattered most to me in that moment?

Write honestly. This is for you alone.

Step 3 — Notice

Without judging or fixing anything, simply notice:

- What stands out to me about my motive?
- What does this reveal about what moves me under pressure?

Then stop.

Decision Two: A Poor Outcome

Step 1 – Recall the Situation

Describe the decision plainly and concretely.

- What was happening?
- What choice did you face?
- What was at stake?
- What pressures were present?

Step 2 – Examine Your Motive

Again, focus on the moment of decision.

- *What was I hoping for?*
- *What was I trying to avoid or secure?*
- *What fear, desire, or assumption influenced me most?*
- *What felt most important at the time?*

Be truthful. Resist explanation or justification.

Step 3 – Notice

Pause and notice:

- What do I see about myself here?
- Do any similarities appear between these two decisions?
- What seems to influence me when something is on the line?

A Process Worth Following

While there are no guaranteed outcomes in leadership or life, this exercise will not only help you become more aware of what motivates your choices and actions, but for many, is a powerful first step into the spiritual life.

To learn how to apply this tool in your own growth and leadership context, scan the QR code to schedule a complimentary coaching session with Darren Smith.

