

Will is silver, habit is gold

Barack Obama is said to have only worn grey and blue suits during his time in office as President of the USA. When asked about this in an interview, he said: 'I try to minimise decisions. I don't want to have to think about what I eat or what I wear. Because I have too many other decisions to make.'

Peter Näf

With this strategy, he freed up mental capacity for important decisions, of which he had no shortage. After all, decisions are tiring, which is known as decision fatigue. Roy Baumeister and John Tierney describe this in their book «Willpower» using an impressive example: researchers investigated the decision-making behaviour of judges who had to decide on the early release of prisoners during the day.

Weakened willpower due to fatigue

The risk of release was that those released would reoffend. It therefore took courage and mental effort to reach a favourable decision. A negative judgement was easier, as the judges were on the safe side. The researchers found the following pattern: Judges approved significantly more applications earlier in the morning than around midday; again, more in the afternoon and fewer towards the evening. What was the reason for this?

The judges became hungry and tired around midday, which weakened their willpower. Rested, they granted more applications after the lunch break. The fatigue that set in towards the end of the working day weakened their willpower again and they often ruled in the negative.

Their willingness to make decisions thus followed the familiar two-humped shape curve of

people with a pronounced high phase of energy in the morning and a somewhat less strong one in the afternoon.

Create good habits

If we want to avoid 'decision fatigue', we need to reduce the number of decisions we make by automating unimportant decisions through habits, such as Obama's choice of clothing and food. For example, a binding entry in the agenda for sporting activities prevents us from postponing activities due to momentary feelings of displeasure. Procrastination causes us to multiply decisions as we must make them several times. As a result, they take up too much room in our lives.

In addition to counselling, my work as an independent coach involves countless small tasks that are not particularly important in themselves, but still need to be done. The only way I can get them off the desk is through routines - i.e. habits. Otherwise, they would take up valuable time that I need for more important tasks.

Our brain works the same way: It automates everything we do repeatedly. This keeps our working memory free for new challenges. Imagine if, after years of practice driving a car, you had to perform every single movement consciously and therefore deliberately. This would make you ready for bed again after your morning journey to work.

[#coaching](#) [#strategiccareerdesign](#)
[#personalitydevelopment](#)

Please find further articles on career topics on my homepage
<https://karrierecoaching.ch/en/articles/>

