A LINE ON LIFE

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A Decision Trap

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Which is more important in determining a person's adjustment: heredity or environment?

As a police officer, you and your partner come across a robbery in progress. The gunman shoots your partner and flees. Would you chase the gunman or stay to help your partner?

If you (an excellent swimmer) are alone in a rowboat with your wife and child (both non-swimmers), which one would you save when the rowboat capsizes in the middle of a lake?

All of these examples have one thing in common – they ask you to make and "*either-or*" decision. This may be a **decision trap.** In other words, no matter which choice you make, you are caught in a trap. They want you to consider *only* the choices offered rather than some other alternatives. They may not be aware of other alternatives. More information (readily available in some real-life situations) may be needed before an actual decision can be made.

In our first example, the question makes you more likely to ignore the possibility that *both* heredity and environment are important. The degree of importance of each may vary depending on what type of adjustment is being made.

With the police officer, no matter which choice you make, you have problems. If you aid the partner, the gunman flees and may rob (or kill) someone later. If you chase the gunman, your partner may die due to your neglect.

However, in a real-life situation, you will probably be able to quickly rate the seriousness of your partner's wound. Where is he shot? Is there much bleeding? Is he conscious? You would also have some estimate of the likelihood you have of catching the gunman. How far away from you is he? In relation to how fast he is running, how fast can you run? How well do you know this neighborhood to head the gunman off?

Even in this situation, there may be other alternatives. If you have a hand-held, two-way radio (as many police officers do), you could run after the gunman while calling for aid for your partner (and yourself).

With the rowboat overturning, there are also many factors that will affect you decision. How deep is the water? Can you (or your wife or child) stand? How far away is the shore? How old is the child? Are either of them conscious or capable of holding on to the

boat? Is there a current? Can you see either (or both) of them? Are both within easy reach, or is one (or both) far away?

Already you can see possible alternatives that you may not have thought about when the question was first asked. You can have the conscious one hang on to the boat, while you save the other. Have your wife hold on to your child, while you pull her to safety.

If anyone asks you an "*either-or*" question, you need to look for other alternatives and ask for more information.

So – the next time someone asks you an "*either-or*" question, be aware that there may be other alternatives. Also, be sure that you have the information you need to make a good decision. Don't fall into a decision trap!
