

Pam Farrel's 7 SIMPLE SKILLS™ for Every Woman

Rubber Band Decision-Making Skill

In my newest book, *Simple Skills for Every Woman: Success in Keeping Everything Together*, we walk readers through a series of simple decision-making skills. However, when several options present themselves and they all look great, we need some new tools to help us discern God's will for our family and future.

The Priority Test

Step 1: Write out your decision in a positive way.

Describe what you will do if you say yes to this decision. For instance, "I am considering moving my family to Colorado to begin working for a company there that would result in a pay increase." Whichever way you go with a decision like this, define the direction you will take if you say yes to the decision. Take full ownership of your choice and put your heart into it. You want to leave no room for negative thinking.

Step 2: Make a pro/con list.

Create two columns on a sheet of paper. On one side, write down the reasons why you ought to take this course of action. On the other side, write down the reasons why this course of action is not a good idea.

Step 3: Prioritize the reasons.

In both columns prioritize the reasons you have listed. The Bible clearly teaches that priorities lead to progress. Psalm 90:12, challenges us, "Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom." As you prioritize your thinking, wise decisions make themselves known.

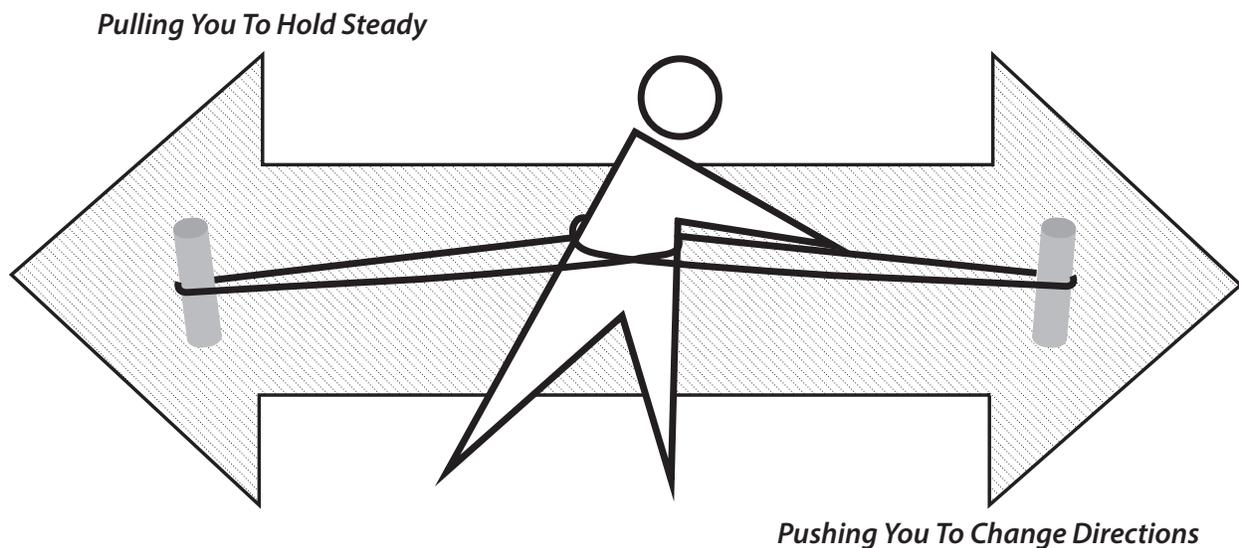
We prefer to use an ABC system to prioritize our lists. This means we assign an A to the vital reasons on the list. The supportive reasons get a B. We reserve a C for the reasons we came up that are not pressing.

Step 4: Compare the high-priority reasons from both lists.

Evaluate the A reasons for saying yes with the A reasons for choosing no. If it is a tie, then move to the B reasons to see if the decision becomes clear. Don't be fooled by quantity. It is quite possible that one list will have more reasons than the other, but this is inconsequential. Many people will automatically choose the list that has the largest number of reasons, however, quantity is no substitute for quality. The way to build clarity is to deliberately prioritize the evidence and discipline yourself to focus on the A reasons.

The Rubberband

Another way to look at this "pro-con" model is to think of yourself wrapped between two bungee cords (or rubber bands), each pulling in opposite directions¹. One side is "What is pulling you to stay?" (What is HOLDING you in place?) The other side is "What is pushing you to change?" (What is HARKENING you forward?) By writing out the list as a holding you/pulling you comparison, you might gain confirmation on your Priorities Test.



We have used this Rubberband Grid to weigh out numerous career opportunities during the years we raised our family. Some led to a move, others compelled us to stay. Let me give a quick example on when this pull-push model helped us recently make a decision on where to live. We had launched all of our children. They were all in college or married. (They were all tracking with God and independent leaders so none had an obvious need to have us living near.) Bill had just transitioned from working as the Small Groups Pastor for Dr. David Jeremiah because our Love-Wise ministry was expanding and our opportunities for speaking and writing were escalating. Then the global economic crash happened—this impacted most everyone. We didn't see the impact right away because speaking is booked usually a year or more out but we saw the writing on the wall. We needed to apply creative thinking to see how to best weather the unpredictable financial whirlwind ahead. We live in California and the cost of living is a higher here. We decided at this life stage the world was a blank canvas. So much of our work is digital, and we travel to speak anyway so we could live anywhere. We wondered, "Is God asking us to move?"

First we applied the "Obvious Test" and reviewed principles in God's Word:

- We needed to work, so where could we best fulfill this? ("...If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat." 2 Thes 3:10 ESV.
- We needed to check in to see if any of our aging parents needed care, so was it time to move nearer them or move them nearer us? (He must manage his own family well ... 1 Tim 3:4–5 NIV. "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after ... widows ..." James 1:27)

Our parents, at the time, were in relatively good health. We had a conversation with each but neither side seemed to need a change. We then ran the priority test and even asked some trusted friends, family members and colleagues to weigh in. The opinions on "where's best" to live were all over the globe!

When we prayed over the list above, it seemed the top priorities became:

- **Continue ministry in a place that was financially prudent:**

Then Jesus came to them and said, "... Therefore go and make disciples of all nations ... teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always ... (Mt 28:18–20 NIV) "first sit down and estimate the cost ..." (Luke 14:28)

- Stay as healthy as possible so we can continue the rigors of a traveling ministry (so anyplace with good weather looked more promising helping us take care of our bodies as the "temples of the Spirit" 1 Cor 6:19)
- Have a team around us for help and accountability (connecting to "the body of Christ" 1 Cor. 12:27 could happen in several places.)

So we weighed out the options and this pull and push approach really helped us know what to do. We set up a rubric on our list of top qualities needed in the city that would be the best “home” for us and our ministry (* marked the A priorities):

Pulling us to HOLD Tight

Major airport within a 20 minute drive*
Country like setting (neighbors not too close)*
Zoning to allow us to work from home ministry*
Weather that allows us to be healthy*
Weather that allows the ministry freedom (no snow/ice days)*
Housing market able to handle sale of home with enough to buy again*
Team of staff and friends to help with ministry*
Church that values our involvement
The ocean
The kids and grandkids want us to stay living close to beach
Built in office and film studio completed and paid for

Pushing us to Harken Forward

Major airport*
Country like setting
Zoning*
Team of staff and friends to help*
Church that values our involvement
Possibly a lake
Live nearer the kids/ grandkids

Because we love family, we did feel a strong push toward them, but our sons lived in three different states (two were in college and hadn't settled into careers, and variables in the city our eldest lived in put my health at risk.) While a few cities did provide the “affordable plane ticket” major airport needed, only a few were in climates that were conducive to our frequent travel without delays; and fewer still had temperatures or altitudes that provided the wellness and health priority we felt we needed in life's second half. We have friends and ministry colleagues around the world, so we knew we could rebuild or hire a staff and team, but trust takes time and at this critical juncture, only a couple of options were very certain. There are thousands of great churches and wonderful pastors who would welcome what we had to give, so for the most part, this was a secondary item (a “B” priority). The housing sales market was mushy and when we crunched the numbers, we knew we would not make the kind of profit that was prudent as we transitioned into full-time entrepreneurial ministry. Even though houses might be more affordable in other cities, unless we made something on our home, a move with a loss this near retirement didn't seem prudent. (So this became an “A”)

Moreover, when our sons and our daughters-in-law expressed their desire for us to stay near the beach in case any of them found jobs in Southern California, or wanted to use the house for vacations, that pull toward keeping our home and staying put was compelling. So we laid out a “stay put plan” and set a date to re-evaluate in the future. At any time, God can add new variables and priorities, and God might PUSH our heart to another location, but for now God has pulled our heart home—we are staying put in Southern California—and enjoying beach walks and kayaking in this season while God has us parked near the ocean.

“Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, “This is the way; walk in it.” (Is. 30:21NIV)

Love-Wise

www.Love-Wise.com

Pam and Bill Farrel are the authors of 40 books including *Simple Skills for Every Woman* and *Simple Skills for Every Man*. They have been happily married 35 years and enjoy traveling to see their far flung family and doing ministry worldwide.

They are the Directors of www.Love-Wise.com Download a copy of the Rubber Band Decision-Making Grid at www.jbu.org