

# On Sequencing

## *Why acting later can be safer than acting now*

Most people who come to me are not stuck because they lack information. They are stuck because they are trying to make a decision out of order.

They are often capable, conscientious, and reflective. They have read widely. They have spoken to friends, partners, colleagues. They have thought carefully about what is not working and what might need to change. From the outside, it can look like indecision or overthinking. From the inside, it usually feels like pressure.

The pressure is rarely dramatic. It does not arrive as a crisis, but as a constant low-level urgency that never quite goes away. A sense that something needs to change, that staying as things are is quietly untenable, that time is slipping by. Sometimes the pressure comes from money. Sometimes from work that no longer fits. Sometimes from a relationship or a place that has begun to feel constraining. Often it is a mixture of all three.

What people usually ask at this point is, “What should I do next?”. What they almost never ask is whether “next” is even the right thing to decide.

Over time, I have noticed that outcomes in major transitions are less determined by courage, intelligence, or effort than by sequence. The order in which decisions are taken matters more than the decisions themselves. When things go wrong, it is often not because someone chose badly, but because someone chose prematurely, when the situation was still foggy and the real constraints were still unnamed.

A decision taken too early can close doors that would otherwise have remained open. A decision taken slightly later, with a clearer understanding of constraints, can unlock options that were invisible before. This is not because the person has changed, but because the situation has become more legible. Choices do not exist in a vacuum. They exist inside a structure, and the structure changes when you change one element. That is why sequence matters. The early moves reshape the board.

Sequencing is not about delay for its own sake. It is not about avoiding responsibility or hiding from commitment. It is about understanding which problems are real, which are temporary, and which are being used to stand in for something harder to name. Acting later is not safer because time itself solves things, but because time allows the structure of a situation to reveal itself. Waiting can be a way of seeing.

Pressure has a distorting effect on judgement. When people feel under pressure, they compress time. The future collapses into the present, and every decision starts to feel existential. Action becomes attractive not because it is right, but because it promises relief. Doing something feels better than sitting with uncertainty, even if that something introduces new risks.

There is also a subtler distortion. Under pressure, people start to treat emotional discomfort as evidence. The mind says, “This feels unbearable, so I must be close to the truth.” In reality, discomfort often indicates complexity, not clarity. You can be uncomfortable because you are about to do something brave, and you can also be uncomfortable because you are about to make an expensive mistake. Those sensations can feel identical.

This is why people often reach for decisive moves that appear to resolve everything at once. Quitting a job. Moving somewhere new. Buying land. Ending a relationship. Starting a new project. These actions carry symbolic weight. They feel like statements of intent. Sometimes they are appropriate. Often they are responses to discomfort rather than to the underlying structure of the situation.

I see this most clearly when people describe decisions that “made sense at the time” but later created new constraints. A move that increased living costs before income was stabilised. A resignation that removed leverage before alternatives were tested. A purchase that reduced flexibility at the very moment flexibility was needed. These are not moral failures or lapses in character. They are sequencing errors.

The problem is not that people act. The problem is that they act on the wrong variable first. Good sequencing creates slack. Slack creates safety. Safety allows honesty.

Slack can take many forms. Financial margin. Time. Emotional support. Geographic flexibility. A sense that not every outcome is catastrophic. When people have even a small margin, their thinking changes. They become less reactive. They stop treating every choice as a referendum on their entire identity. They can distinguish between what feels urgent and what is actually important. They can afford to tell themselves the truth.

Without slack, every decision feels loaded. The stakes feel higher than they are, and fear starts to masquerade as intuition. People confuse the discomfort of uncertainty with evidence that they must act immediately. In reality, the discomfort is often a signal that the situation is not yet fully understood. It is the feeling of being inside a maze without a map, and the temptation is to run because standing still feels like danger.

One of the most common errors I see is treating urgency as insight. People assume that because something feels pressing, it must therefore be clear. But urgency often arises precisely when clarity is missing. The mind looks for something definite to grasp. It wants to collapse ambiguity into a single decisive move. Action becomes a way of escaping uncertainty rather than working with it.

This is where sequence matters most. Acting early can feel like progress, but it can also be a way of foreclosing learning. Acting slightly later, once the contours of the problem are clearer, often requires less effort and carries less risk. It is not passivity. It is discernment. It is recognising that “doing something” is not the same as “doing the right next thing.”

The period between recognising that something needs to change and knowing what that change should be is deeply uncomfortable. It can feel unproductive, even irresponsible. Many people interpret waiting as weakness or avoidance. In reality, it is often the phase in which the most important information emerges, if it is allowed to. Patterns repeat. Pressures reveal themselves. Incentives become visible. You notice what reliably destabilises you, and what reliably steadies you.

This applies across domains. Work transitions are the most obvious example, but the same dynamics appear in location changes, financial commitments, and relationship decisions. In relationships in particular, people can feel intense pressure to resolve ambiguity through decisive action, when what is actually required is a clearer understanding of dependencies, timing, and personal capacity. Again, the issue is rarely whether a change is needed, but when and in what order.

Sequencing is ultimately about reversibility. A good early decision is one that preserves future options. A poor early decision is one that reduces optionality before it needs to. This is why dramatic moves made under pressure often come with hidden costs. They feel brave, but they are frequently expensive in ways that only become apparent later.

Reversibility does not mean avoiding commitment forever. It means being deliberate about which commitments you make first. Some decisions can be tested. Others cannot. Understanding the difference matters. Acting as if all decisions are equally irreversible leads people either to freeze or to leap. Both are responses to fear rather than to structure.

A useful question is not “What do I want?” but “What can I change without breaking everything else?” Another is “What decision, if made now, would make the rest harder?” In many situations, the safest early move is not the one that feels most satisfying. It is the one that increases your margin. It might be boring and it might look small, but it changes the downstream options.

I do not believe there is a single right path for most people. What I do believe is that there is usually a safer order in which to explore the paths that are available. Finding that order requires stepping back from the urge to resolve everything at once. It requires separating structural constraints from emotional ones, and short-term relief from long-term freedom. It requires accepting that clarity often arrives after you stabilise the constraint, not before.

The work I do is quiet and structured. It is not about motivation or vision. It is about making the situation in front of you more legible, so that decisions can be taken with less risk and fewer unintended consequences. I am not interested in speed for its own sake. I am interested in decisions that can be lived with.

I run a small private practice called Wild & Quiet. I work with people facing transitions where order matters more than effort. This essay reflects how I think about that work.

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