

Learning to Trust Your Own Judgment Again

Self-trust is not knowing that you will always choose correctly. It is knowing that you will not abandon yourself when you don't.



Divorce can make ordinary decisions feel unexpectedly difficult.

What should I do with the house? Can I afford this? Should I move? Should I say yes? Should I say no? Am I overreacting? Am I missing something? What if I make another bad decision?

Sometimes the problem is not the decision itself. It is that you no longer feel certain you can trust the person making it.

You.

Hindsight Can Be Brutal

After a marriage ends, especially one that involved betrayal, conflict, or years of unhappiness, it is easy to look backward and ask:

How did I not see this? Why did I believe him? Why didn't I leave sooner? Why did I ignore that? How could I have been so wrong?

These questions can sound like reflection. Sometimes they are.

But sometimes they become evidence for a much larger conclusion:

My judgment cannot be trusted.

That conclusion deserves examination. Because being wrong about something is not the same as being incapable of judgment.

You Made Decisions With the Information You Had

This sounds obvious. It rarely feels obvious afterward. When you know how the story ends, earlier decisions can look ridiculous. But you did not make them while standing at the end. You made them inside the life you were living. With the information available then. With responsibilities you had then. With hopes you had then. With financial realities, children, health, faith, fear, loyalty, exhaustion, love, and uncertainty all present at the same time.

Maybe you missed something. Maybe you rationalized something. Maybe you gave someone too much benefit of the doubt. Maybe you stayed longer than you now wish you had.



That may all be true. And still, your earlier self did not have access to the clarity you have now.

Judgment develops partly because experience gives us information we did not have before. Learning from a decision is evidence that judgment is functioning.

Not that it failed beyond repair.

Criticism Can Become an Internal Voice

In some marriages, judgment becomes difficult because it has been repeatedly questioned. You are too sensitive. You are overreacting. You misunderstood. You worry too much. You are bad with money. You don't remember correctly. You're making a big deal out of nothing. Perhaps these things were said directly. Perhaps the message was subtler.

Over time, another person's interpretation can begin arriving inside your own mind before you even make a decision.

You think:

This doesn't feel right.

And immediately hear:

You're probably overreacting.

You want something.

Then:

That's not practical.

You notice a problem.

Then:

Maybe I'm being difficult.

Eventually, you may no longer need the other person in the room. The argument continues without them.

Compromise Can Make Preference Hard to Hear

Not every loss of self-trust comes from harmful criticism. Marriage itself requires negotiation. Where to live. How to spend money. Whose family to visit. When to retire. What to buy. How to spend Saturday.

After years or decades of shared decision-making, you may simply be out of practice making choices without reference to another person's preferences. That is not pathology. It is rust. And rust can be worked with. You can begin with small decisions.

What do I actually want for dinner? Do I want to go? Do I like this? Do I want to spend money on this? Do I want company today?

Not:

What should a newly divorced woman want?

Not:

What would make the most sense to everyone else?

Just:

What do I think?

Self-Trust Is Not Certainty

This distinction matters. Trusting yourself does not mean becoming certain. It does not mean never asking for advice. It does not mean believing your first impression is always correct. It does not mean refusing to reconsider.

Healthy self-trust can sound like:

I can make the best decision available with what I know now. If I learn something important, I can revise. If I make a mistake, I can respond to it. I do not need perfect



certainty before acting.

That is very different from:

I must get every decision right.

The second one is not self-trust. It is fear wearing a clipboard.

Start With Decisions That Are Reversible

When confidence is low, every decision can feel permanent. It helps to remember that many are not. Try the class. Move the furniture. Take the trip. Say no to the invitation. Change the haircut. Buy the chair. If you hate it, adjust.

Not every choice requires a strategic summit. Reversible decisions give you opportunities to experience yourself making choices and living with the result. Sometimes the decision works. Sometimes it doesn't. Either way, you learn something.

Self-trust grows through evidence.

Notice the Decisions You Are Already Making

After divorce, people often focus on the decisions they fear. They overlook the hundreds they are already making. You handled the appointment. Paid the bill. Called the attorney. Fixed the problem. Chose not to respond to the text. Changed the insurance. Asked for help. Declined bad advice. Got through the holiday. Changed your mind. You may not feel confident while doing these things.

Confidence is not always present before action.

Sometimes it arrives later, when you look back and realize:

I handled that.

That matters.

Ask for Counsel Without Handing Over Authority

There are times when outside guidance is wise. Financial decisions. Legal decisions. Health decisions. Large purchases. Major moves. Complicated family matters. Self-trust does not require doing everything alone.

But there is a difference between receiving counsel and surrendering authority. A trustworthy advisor helps you understand the decision. They do not make you smaller. They explain. Clarify. Offer options. Identify risks. Leave room for questions. And then recognize that the life affected by the decision is yours.

Good advice strengthens judgment. It does not replace it.

Learn the Difference Between Discomfort and Danger

After a painful marriage or divorce, uncertainty itself can feel dangerous. A decision produces anxiety, so you assume the decision must be wrong. But discomfort is not always a warning. Sometimes it simply means something is unfamiliar. Saying no may feel uncomfortable. Making a large decision alone may feel uncomfortable. Setting a boundary may feel uncomfortable. Choosing differently from your children, friends, or former spouse may feel uncomfortable.

The question is not only:

Am I uncomfortable?

It is:

What is the discomfort telling me?

Sometimes it says stop. Sometimes it says slow down. Sometimes it says this is new. Discernment grows by learning the difference.

You Can Make a Mistake and Still Trust Yourself

This may be the most important part. You will make another mistake. So will I. So will every person giving you advice. The goal cannot be never being wrong again. That is impossible.

The deeper question is:



Can I trust myself to respond when I discover I was wrong?

Can you change course? Apologize? Sell the thing? Leave the situation? Ask for help? Learn? Try again?

That capacity may be far more important than perfect prediction.

Self-trust is not faith in your infallibility. It is confidence in your ability to remain in relationship with reality.

Stop Using the Marriage as the Final Exam

Sometimes every new decision becomes a referendum on the old ones. If I choose badly now, it proves I was foolish then. If I trust someone and get hurt, it proves I learned nothing. If I make the wrong financial decision, it proves I cannot manage on my own. That is an impossible standard. The marriage does not need to remain the final exam against which every future choice is graded.

You are allowed to make a mediocre restaurant choice without turning it into evidence about your character. You are allowed to misjudge someone. You are allowed to spend money on something you later wish you had not. You are allowed to make ordinary human errors.

Your life is not a remediation course for having been married to the wrong person.

Judgment Gets Stronger Through Use

Self-trust is rarely restored through reassurance alone.

Someone can tell you:

"Trust yourself."

That may feel nice. It may not change much. Trust grows when you use judgment. Observe what happens. Learn from the result. Use judgment again. Over time, you begin recognizing patterns. You notice when something feels off and understand why. You learn which people give good advice. You learn where you tend to rush. Where you tend to doubt yourself unnecessarily. Where you need more information. Where you already know enough.

The goal is not immediate certainty. It is increasing fluency in your own decision-making.

You Are Allowed to Be the Authority in Your Own Life

Other people may disagree with your choices. Your children. Friends. Family. Professionals.

People who believe they know exactly what divorced women should do next. Listen when someone has earned the right to be heard. Consider information that deserves consideration. Revise when reality requires revision.

And remember:

Advice is input. Consensus is optional. The life is yours.

You do not need a committee vote to decide what belongs in it.

Trust Is Built Forward

You may never feel completely satisfied with every decision you made in the marriage. You may always wish you had recognized some things sooner. That does not prevent self-trust now. You do not rebuild trust in yourself by proving that your past judgment was flawless. You rebuild it by practicing judgment in the present. One decision. Then another. Some small. Some consequential. Some right. Some revised.

And gradually you discover that you are not waiting for someone else to certify that you can trust yourself. You are gathering evidence. You can observe. You can think. You can ask for help. You can decide. You can learn. You can recover from mistakes. You can change direction. And that is enough.

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**CONTINUE THE SERIES**

Next: The Difference Between Being Alone and Having a Life of Your Own

Divorce can bring loneliness, relief, solitude, freedom, fear, and unexpected quiet-sometimes all at once. Next, we'll look at the difference between being alone and inhabiting a life that belongs to you, without assuming that recovery requires another relationship.