

Noel Swain: Overcoming Indecision

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I'm sure you
had this
happen when
you were a

little kid. You excitedly approached your mom or dad and asked them for a new toy, and they responded with the deadliest of answers, "We'll see." What do you do with that? If they said no, you could beg or argue. If they said yes you could leave happy in the knowledge that the object of your desire would soon be yours. But "we'll see?" Begging or arguing is not appropriate because they didn't say no. But neither did they say yes, which left you completely unfulfilled. Then when you grew up, you did the same thing to your kids, didn't you? Yes you did, go ahead and admit it! We have all had it done to us and we have all done it to others.

Why do we do that? Why do we find it so hard to just make a decision and stick with it? If the answer is yes, or if the answer is no, we have now decided and we can move on from there. But we don't do that. We leave the decision unmade.

I believe the reason we don't like to decide something, like if our kid can have that new catcher's mitt, is the finality of it and the feeling we may have made the wrong choice. If we don't decide right away there's been no mistake because it could still go either way. We don't know if the catcher's mitt will even be used. It may just sit on a

shelf unused and be an item in the yard sale you hold 20 years from now. Or, your son may join the baseball team, get better and better and wind up a major league baseball player. And it may all hinge on that one decision, buy the mitt or not.

Not deciding, however, is a decision, a NO decision. And because you didn't decide, your son never got the mitt and didn't join the baseball team at school. Instead, he started hanging out with a group of bad kids and started getting in trouble with the law. So, ten years from now, instead of going to the ball park to watch your kid play baseball, you visit him on weekends where there is a thick glass between you, all because you said "we'll see" when it came to buying him a catcher's mitt.

I make a lot of recommendations to potential clients to implement a plan we have put together for them. Many times I'll hear a "let me think about it," which is the equivalent of "we'll see." They may agree that it's a good plan. But doing something different is often times uncomfortable, so they resort to the "let me think about it" answer. Two weeks later the internal pressure to make a decision has subsided, and nothing happens. So just remember, when you don't decide, that becomes a decision, and usually without the thought that should have been put behind it.