

OPINION

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Decision Analysis: Is the Grass Really Greener Elsewhere?

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It happens to everyone: A house comes on the market that you have been eyeing for some time. A job posting announces an opportunity at a company that you have thought about working for.

Opportunities knock constantly. If they arrive when your current situation is unfavorable, you may be inclined to seize the opportunity and jump ship. Yet, what may appear to be greener pastures may be an illusion.

Change is hard. We are prone to get comfortable with the status quo. This means that the bar for change is intrinsically high. That is why if we want to move to a new home or take on a new job, the gain must be more than incrementally better than our current living or working situations.

Yet, any change involves risk. There are known risks that we can prepare for with due diligence. We reduce our risks when purchasing a new home by getting a house inspection to uncover any potential problems and issues that can make what appears like a great deal far less favorable.

However, the most difficult risks to manage are those that are unknown, unseen and remain hidden from view. It could be eroding water pipes that cannot be easily detected or a foundation that is slowly giving way with no signs of such an impending collapse.

The same holds true with new jobs. We follow due diligence to investigate the company, the work environment, as well as the products and services that it delivers. The internet makes such searches far easier than they once were.

Then there are the unknown risks, like well-hidden senior management ideas that make day-to-day work life unbearable. Or even corrupt accounting that is carefully hidden until an audit reveals their dark figures. Think about the people who joined [Enron](#) just prior to its collapse in 2001.

So, although the grass may appear greener elsewhere, it is often because we are not seeing the entire lawn. What we choose to focus on, or what our attention is directed to, does, in fact, appear greener. The problem is that there are likely some tracts of lawn that are blatantly brown, which we either ignore or choose to rationalize as unimportant.

Every option in likely every situation has features that are better than our current situation and features that are worse. Making decisions under such circumstances requires balancing multiple

criteria, something that most of us do poorly. This is the foundation of [decision analysis](#) and how each of us manages [multiple criteria](#).

This is also why people who support the same political party may have highly divergent views on many issues, yet they share a common view on what they consider their most important issue.

For example, if [women's reproductive rights](#) are the defining issue for a person, then they ignore other issues with the Democratic Party that they may find distasteful. In essence, the grass is greener for them with Democrats than with Republicans around this issue.

Similarly, if the [right to own a firearm](#) is the defining issue for a person, then they may ignore other issues with the Republican Party that they may find distasteful. In essence, the grass is greener for them with Republicans than with Democrats around this issue.

The takeaway from this analysis is that the grass looks greener elsewhere either because we are wearing blinders or green-shaded glasses when looking at a particular situation. That is why when making moves of any sort, the decisions should be based on what attracts us to the new opportunity in absolute terms, rather than moving away from the situation we are currently in. It must also weigh all facets of the opportunity, not just those parts that we prioritize.

Also, of course, familiarity will mute any green pasture. Something that is new and different offers initial excitement, which eventually wanes into what is expected and routine.

Yes, the grass may indeed be greener elsewhere. However, it is best to have your eyes examined before making any decision to ensure that what you are seeing is indeed what is there.

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