Seemingly Irrelevant Decisions

Have you ever ended up in a bar or an old using environment without knowing exactly how you got there? Have you ever wanted to just say “hey” to an old using friend or drug dealer and suddenly you have drugs in your hands? If these or a similar situation have happened to you, it’s likely you have made some seemingly irrelevant decisions! **Seemingly Irrelevant Decisions** are decisions that do not seem related to your drug use, but end up putting you in high risk situations. Often, Seemingly Irrelevant Decisions are based on rationalizations and minimizations of risk. In other words, we tell ourselves the situation is not risky or that it would be ok to enter the risky situation just this one time. For example, if you and some friends typically go to Chili’s to drink and suddenly you get the strong urge to go to Chili’s for BBQ ribs, it might really be reflecting an urge to go drink.

Today we will work to identify the small, Seemingly Irrelevant Decisions that have led you to substance use or relapse. If you can learn to identify those decisions, you can also learn to intervene and prevent them from leading you to relapse!

Consider Joe’s story:

"I was going to pick up my wife from work at Denny’s. But as I got close to downtown Peoria, I got restless and decided to detour through downtown to see the progress on the new construction. I had left a half-hour early, so I had extra time to kill, and there was no sense getting there too early. Once I got downtown, I couldn’t resist driving by the Shamrock, where I used to drink. I figured I’d park near there and walk over to the construction site. However, I needed change for the parking meter, so I went into the Shamrock to get change for a buck. After all, convenience stores won’t give you change. When I walked in, I saw Hank. It would have been rude to walk out without talking with him after all this time, so I sat at his table. Before I could tell him otherwise, he’d bought me a beer, and it wouldn’t have been right to refuse it. I’d been sober so long, I knew I could handle one. My wife had to bail me out of the drunk tank.”

Within this story, there are several Seemingly Irrelevant Decisions. Can you list at least five of them?

1.  
2.  
3.  
4.  
5.  

What made these decisions Seemingly Irrelevant?

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Do you think Joe intended on getting drunk when he left work early? Why or why not?
Did self-talk or thoughts influence the Seemingly Irrelevant Decisions that Joe made? How?

Can you relate to the Joe’s story? Consider your own relapse story. Can you pinpoint places where you made risky decisions? You may have noticed in Joe’s story that one Seemingly Irrelevant Decision led to another Seemingly Irrelevant Decision; it isn’t as if he just decided to leave work early and was suddenly at the bar! He actually made lots of decisions along the way. The same is true for your Seemingly Irrelevant Decisions. Use worksheet 1 and fill the bubbles with the chain of Seemingly Irrelevant Decisions that led you to relapse. Start by going backwards; in the bubble to the far right, fill in that you relapsed. Next, think of what decision you made right before that. Continue working backwards until you have filled in all the bubbles.

Why is it important to recognize your past Seemingly Irrelevant Decisions?

Were Seemingly Irrelevant Decisions a big part of your last relapse? Is this surprising?

What did you learn from examining Seemingly Irrelevant Decisions from your last relapse?
Now consider how you could have interrupted the chain of decisions. What coping skills or planning could you have done to change the outcome? What would have been safer decisions for you? Write these on the lines provided surrounding the bubbles.

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What did you learn from examining Seemingly Irrelevant Decisions from your last relapse?
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______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
◊ Pinpoint places where you made seemingly irrelevant decisions in the ovals.
◊ What were you telling yourself?
◊ Identify coping skills you could have used to interrupt the chain on the lines. Connect them to where you could interrupt the chain.