

THE NO RATIONALIZATION RULE



**A PRACTICAL FRAMEWORK FOR MAKING HARD
DECISIONS WITHOUT BETRAYING YOURSELF.**

Journaling in prison led me to understand I was in prison because of terrible fear-based choices.

So I wanted a way, a system, something to make difficult choices easier to make.

I wasn't seeking a shortcut; I was finished with the short, easy path.

Because here's what I've learned about shortcuts:

Shortcuts and hacks in life don't get you where you believe you want to go faster.

They rob you of who you could have become if you'd taken the path less traveled and learned who you truly are.

This was about building a system so that when a situation called for a decision, I could make it with clarity and confidence, knowing it aligned with the life I wanted to live.

The No-Rationalization Rule exists for one reason: so you can make hard decisions without betraying yourself.

You can use the framework to make challenging decisions that don't require you to look over your shoulder or wake you up at 3 am.

This isn't just for major crossroads. Use it in the small daily choices, because every small choice shapes your life.

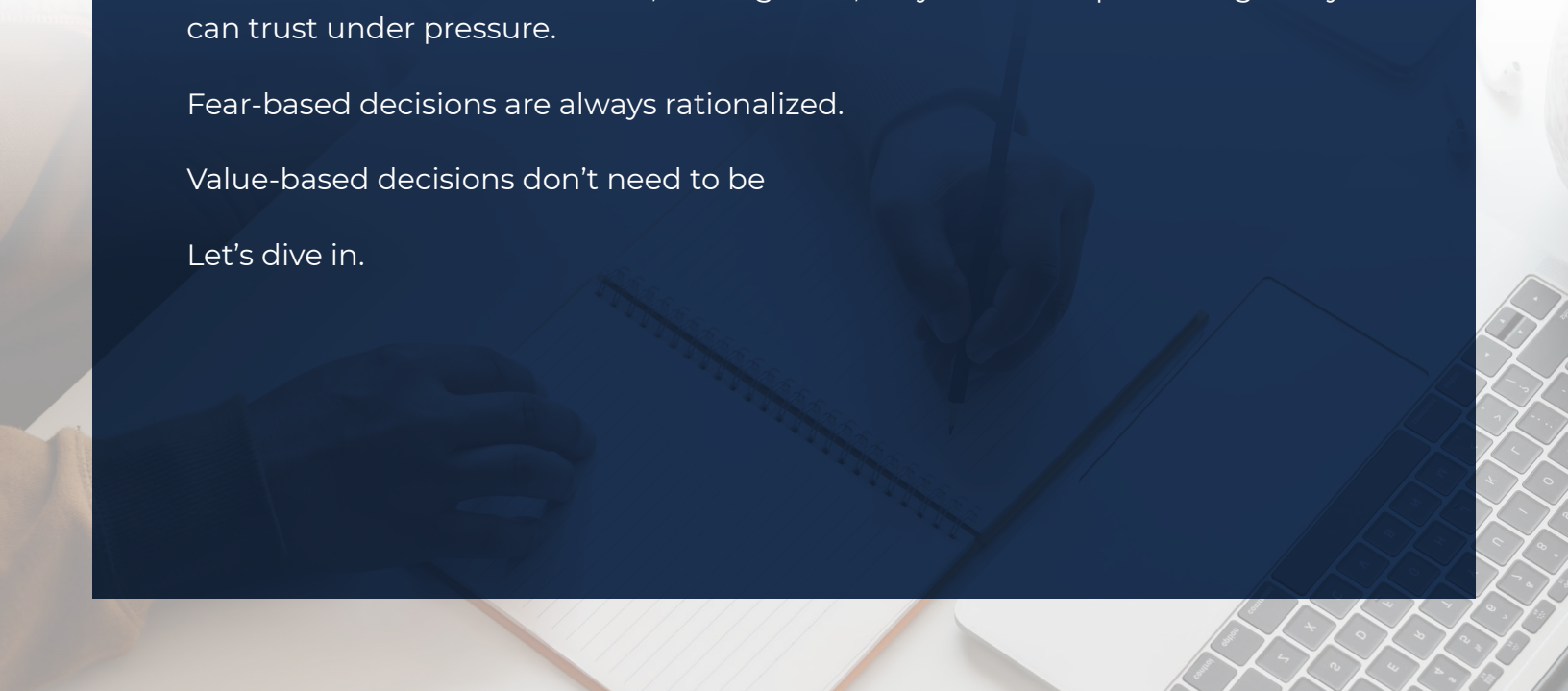
The framework represents our head, our heart, and our soul.

Each of these stands on its own, but together, they become a powerful guide you can trust under pressure.

Fear-based decisions are always rationalized.

Value-based decisions don't need to be

Let's dive in.





While I was journaling in prison, two words started showing up again and again.

FILTER AND LENS.

I imagined a filter through which the circumstance would flow, with my answer coming out the other side.

Like hot water flowing through coffee grounds creates something delicious to drink.

I envisioned a lens through which I could view the circumstance, and I would know the answer.

Similar to how our optic nerve takes in information, and our brain gives it meaning.

Your Filter and Lens are your Core values.

Pick no more than 10 Core Values to keep it manageable.

Values are useless unless they're lived; this is how you bring them off the page and into your daily choices.



3 Exercises to Strengthen Your Filter

- 1 Define for Yourself:** What is YOUR definition of each value?
- 2 Word Association:** The first word (or 3) that comes to mind when you think of each of your core values.
- 3 Fill in the Blank:** When I fully embody my core value of _____, it empowers me to create _____ in my life.

These exercises will help you embody the values and enhance your decision-making.

PROMPT:

When facing a hard decision, run it through your Filter:

Does this align with my values?

EMBODY YOUR IDEAL SELF:

Imagine the ideal version of yourself, living the grandest expression of life you can possibly think of.

You're everything you aspire to be.

Allow yourself to step into this role.

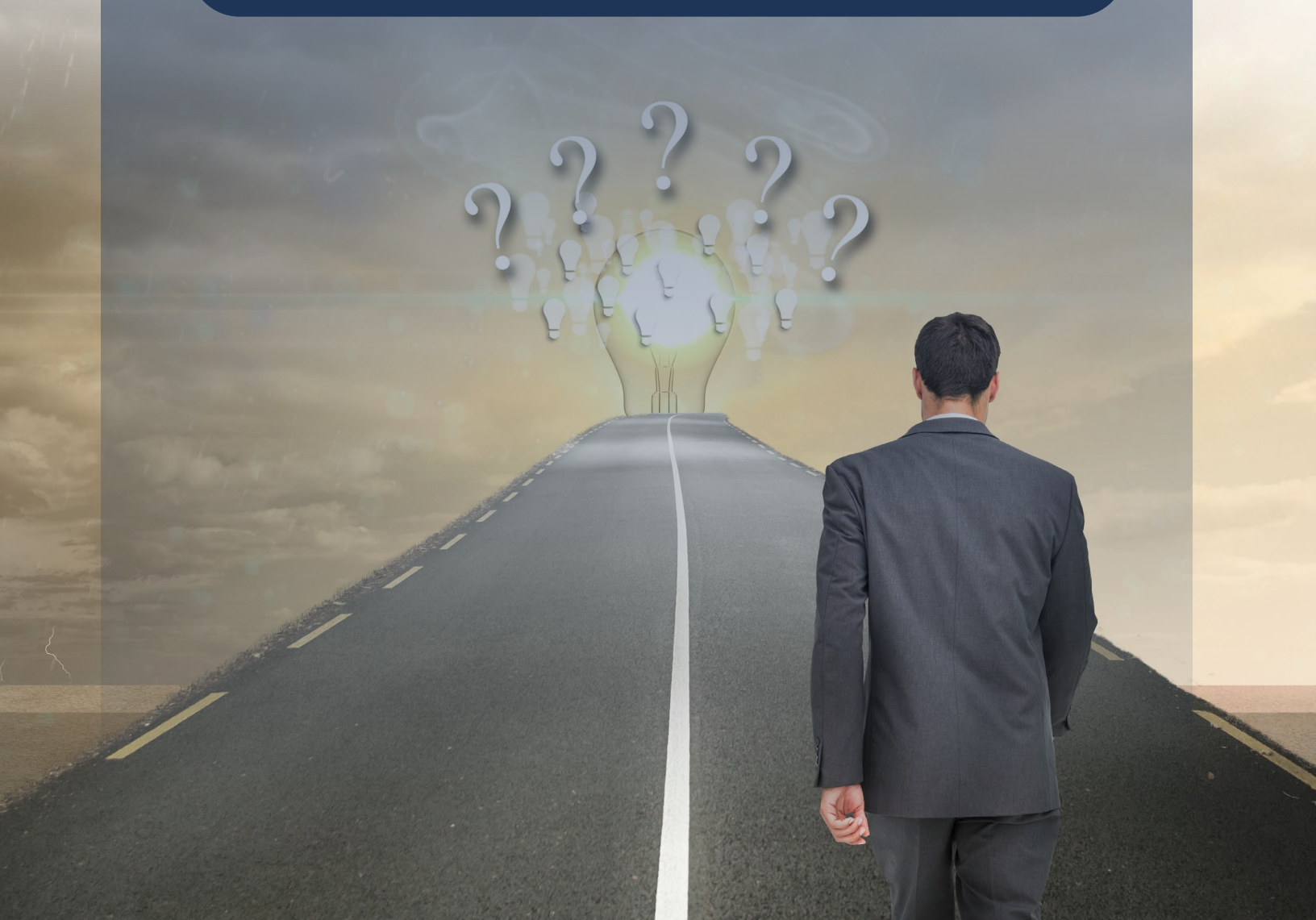
When you embody your ideal self, "What should I do" with all its built-in fear and pressure becomes this question instead:

What would the most courageous version of myself do?

When you operate from your ideal self, you make bold and empowering decisions.



Reminder: Your Ideal Self isn't perfection, it's alignment under pressure.



THE TOMBSTONE TEST:

This is a big one.

Think about the decision you're about to make and think about the worst-case consequence of that decision coming true.

Don't just look at the short-term; play out the worst-case long-term scenarios in your life.

Now ask yourself,

"Is this what I want engraved on my tombstone for all eternity?"

If you wouldn't be proud to have it engraved in stone, it's not the right choice.

Your life isn't built in one grand gesture; it's built in daily decisions.



This isn't a one-time exercise. This is a daily compass.

When values, courage, and legacy align, rationalization disappears.

The No-Rationalization Rule is intentionally designed to be simple so you can build momentum.

When your values, your courage, and your legacy align, you don't rationalize, you act.

You just know.



Reminder: If you have to rationalize, it's a no.

YOUR NEXT STEP:

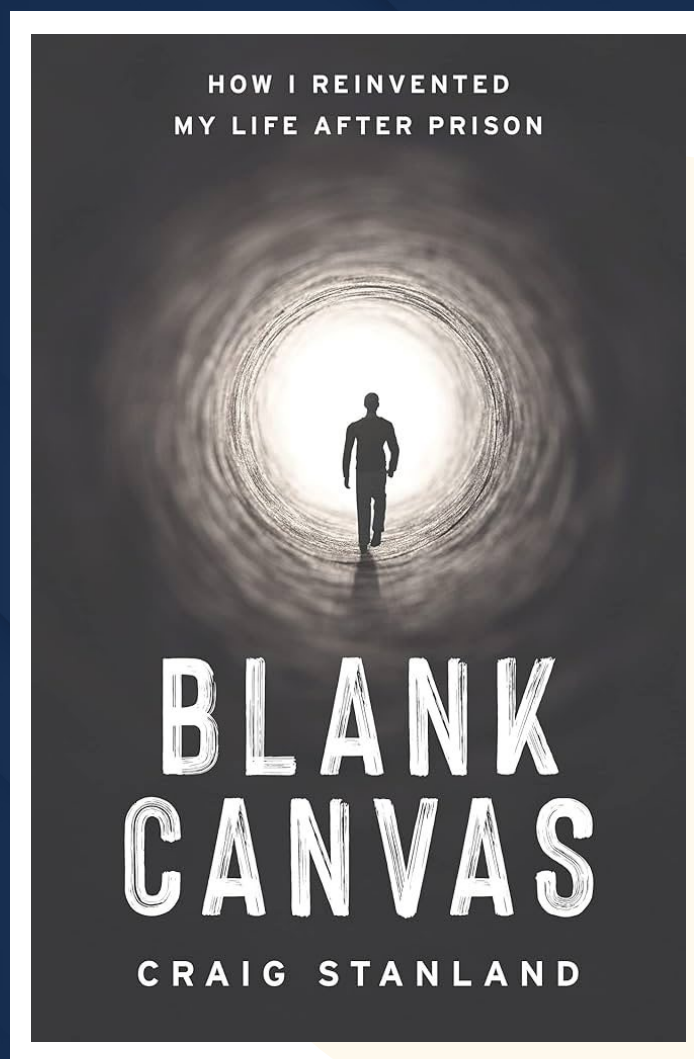
If you want to go deeper, to see how this guide came alive in my own story, begin with [Blank Canvas: How I Reinvented My Life After Prison.](#)

It's the book that laid the foundation for everything you've just practiced.

This isn't theory, it's lived experience.

James Altucher, best-selling author and host of The James Altucher Show, recently recognized Blank Canvas as one of the most impactful hybrid books ever written, placing it alongside some of the world's most influential best-sellers.

Take the next step in your [reinvention.](#)



ABOUT ME:

In 2012, Craig Stanland made a choice that cost him everything: his career, his marriage, his homes, his cars, and even his will to live.

His actions led to a two-year federal prison sentence and the unraveling of the life he'd built.

But hitting rock bottom wasn't the end. It was the beginning.

Today, Craig is a keynote speaker, Reinvention Architect™, author of "Blank Canvas: How I Reinvented My Life After Prison," and a TEDx speaker with his talk, "How I Learned My Greatest Worth in Federal Prison."

He helps individuals and organizations unlock their potential through the lessons learned from his raw, powerful journey from corporate success to federal prison, to a life defined by creativity, authenticity, purpose, and fulfillment.

Through his work, Craig reveals invaluable lessons on resilience, personal growth, and the art of reinvention, proving that it's never too late to rebuild, reimagine, and thrive.

When he's not on stage or writing, you'll find Craig hiking, paddleboarding, attending car shows, relaxing at the beach, or hanging out with his three special-needs cats.

His insights have been featured in outlets including The Good Men Project, Addicted 2 Success, Tiny Buddha, Intelligent Change, Brainz Magazine, and The Altucher Report.

