

Hindsight Bias

Hindsight bias is a type of memory distortion. It is the tendency to look back and see events that have already occurred as having been more predictable than was actually the case

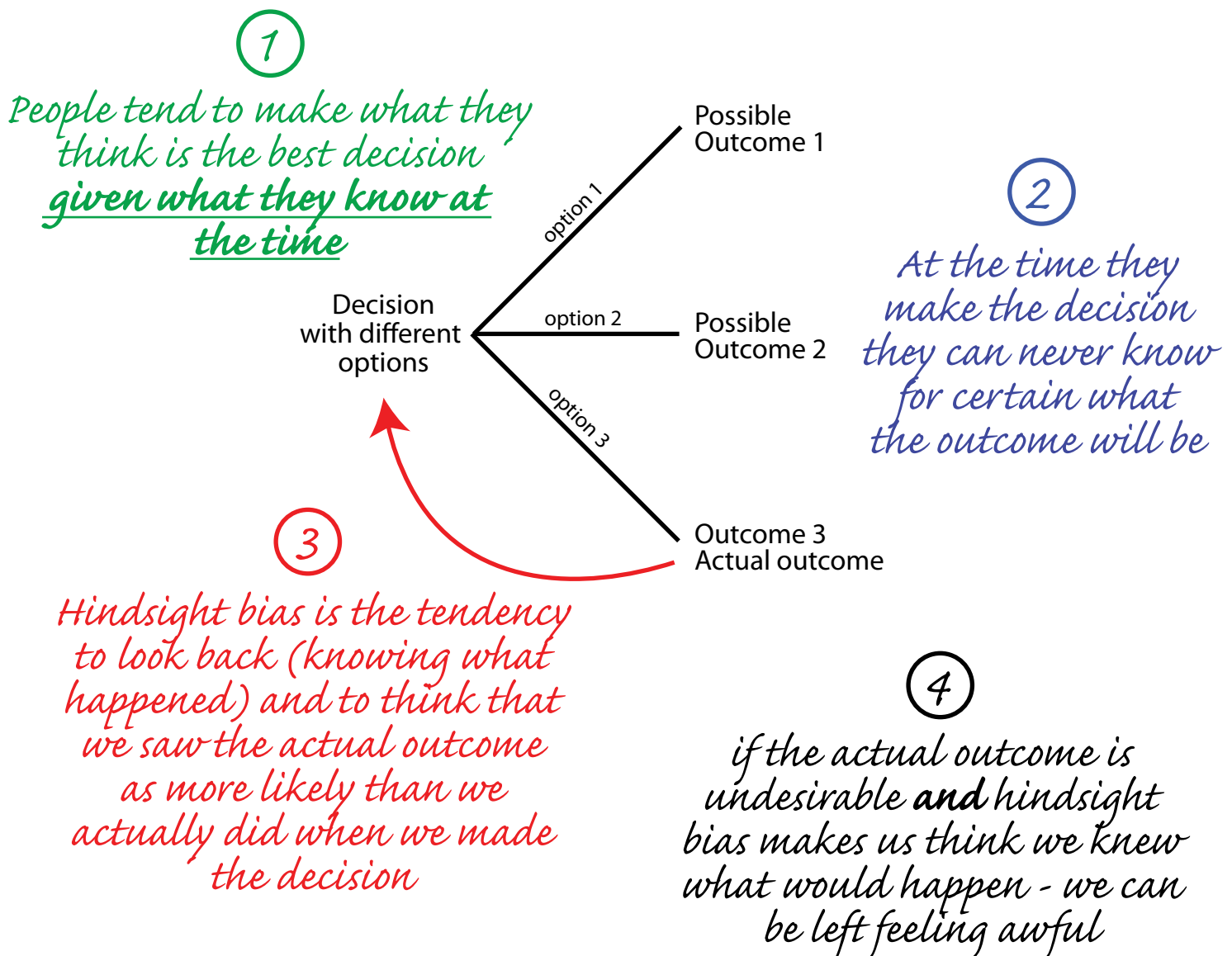
Hindsight bias can make us believe that we knew something at the time even if the evidence indicates we didn't. If this leads us to think we made a bad decision it can result in strong feelings such as guilt or shame

Typical hindsight bias (after-the-event) thoughts are:

"I knew it all along..."

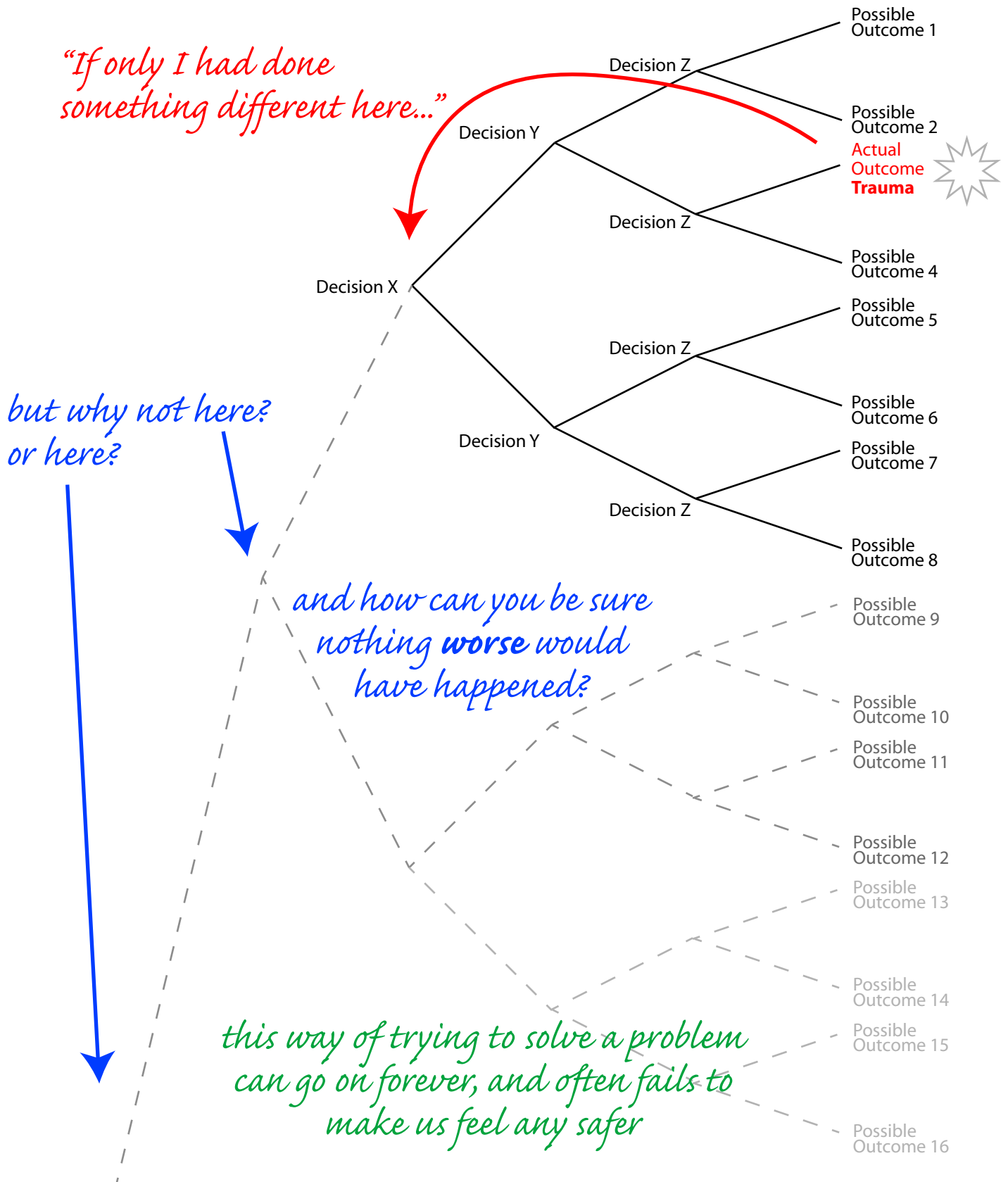
"I must have realized... so why didn't I..."

Life is a series of decisions. Every decision we make can lead to multiple outcomes, or different possibilities. At the time we make a decision we can't possibly know the outcome for certain



Hindsight Bias

When people have experienced a traumatic event many often look back and blame themselves for what happened. It is quite common to fixate on a particular decision and think *"If only I had done something different then... events would have turned out differently"*



Sometimes, blaming ourselves can feel safer than accepting that negative things, over which we have little control, can happen. However, such self-blame comes with its own consequences

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Hindsight bias is a type of memory distortion. It is the tendency to look back and see events that have already occurred as having been more predictable than was actually the case

Hindsight bias can lead people to blame themselves for events which were not predicted, or predictable

A fairer standard to judge our decisions by is 'what did you know at the time'? Courts use this standard to judge people's responsibility for an event. How can you hold someone responsible for something they did not know?

Questions to explore hindsight bias:

What is it that you think you should have known?

What information did you have that would have prevented this outcome?

When did you learn that X would happen, or that you could have done Y?

How could you have known that at the time?

How could you have known something that you didn't know?

If you had known that then, do you think that's what you would have done?

If the horrible outcome hadn't happened, would we be talking about this decision that you made?

Given what you knew then, was it a reasonable or unreasonable decision at the time?

Have you ever made mistakes in your life?

- have you ever gone over the speed limit in your car?*
- have you ever forgotten to finish a course of antibiotics?*

Do you beat yourself up about these mistakes? If not, why not?