



Emotions drive decision-making, study finds

By THANE BURNETT, QMI AGENCY

Last Updated: February 23, 2011 5:31pm

There it is -- that voice climbing up inside the back of your head.

Telling you not to cheat on your taxes.

To stay away from your best friend's spouse.

Like you need more guilt after managing to get that expired Subway coupon past that young clerk.

Relax -- letting our emotions get the better of us is how we stay on the right track, according to a new study by University of Toronto Scarborough researchers.

Their testing looked at the differences between people's moral actions and how they expected to feel when doing something wrong.

The good news is people acted with more morality than expected.

The flip side is people often don't expect to feel the depth or strength of emotions that they do experience when they consider cheating the system.

"I would say (emotions) are one of the main factors," researcher Rimma Teper said of the reasoning that goes into making good choices.

"It seems to be an overarching theme."

The study, published in Psychological Science, a journal of the Association of Psychological Science, notes other research shows people are acting with less morality than they would have expected.

While our emotions -- fear, guilt and love -- guide our hands, Teper says when subjects contemplate how they'll act: "They don't have a good grasp of the intensity of the emotions they will feel."

As a result, they often misjudge which way they will go.

Thinking about fabricating on your taxes is fine, until you go to sign your name.

Subjects in the research were given a chance at cheating during a test, as they were hooked up to heart and breathing monitors.

Those facing the most emotions most often did the right thing.

Subjects were less likely to predict playing it straight, until emotion took control.

"This time, we got a rosy picture of human nature," co-author Michael Inzlicht notes. "But the essential finding is that emotions are what drive you do the right thing or the wrong thing."

Copyright © 2011 Toronto Sun All Rights Reserved

