During the decision making process, there are four behavioral factors that influence the decisions we make. These behavioral factors are our values, our personality, the propensity for risk, and the potential for dissonance of the decision. I will focus on the potential for dissonance. Dissonance begins after a decision is made, as we ponder over the choices we have selected. After we become aware of what alternatives we rejected and the undesirable features of what was chosen and when we do not feel right about our decision, the un-comfortableness and tension in our head is created and this is the cognitive dissonance. There is an inconsistency between our attitudes and our decision, and this creates mixed feelings. We feel pressure to change our thinking. We adjust our thinking to reduce dissonance and tension, and we justify our decision to reduce internal discomfort. Dissonance is greatest when we realize the consequences can potentially affect many people, and when we realize we are the one that will be held responsible for the decision. The conditions that create high dissonance depend on whether the decision is psychological or financially important, whether there are a collection of forgone alternatives, and whether these alternatives have many features.

There are four strategies people will take to reduce their cognitive dissonance: the person will find information to support their decision, will distort information in order to support their decision, will downgrade the alternatives not chosen, or will lessen the negatives of the decision and exaggerate the importance of the positive aspects of the decision.

I recently purchased a device for my home computer that scans text lines using an infra-red adapter and transfers the text into a Word Perfect document. I received the device; it copied some of my school book’s text lines pretty well. Yet when I tried to hook up its infra-red adapter to my computer, the scanner device failed to work. I could not transfer the text in the device to my computer. I had a friend, who is a computer genius, come over to help figure out the problem. We found out the device and the infra-red adapter were working fine, yet my computer’s internal Microsoft program had a bug in it somewhere that would not allow the adapter to work. My device was then defective.

There was pressure to change the rationale of the purchase, because it was not consistent with my personal spending style. There was an inconsistency with my attitude on how much to spend on purchases. It was not typical for me to spend $200 on anything, especially for a device made in a foreign country without any guarantee it would work with U.S. computer products. As
with conditions characterized by the cognitive dissonance theory, this decision was financially and psychologically important. It was a $200 device, I spent probably a week justifying the purchase to my spouse, and I wanted so bad to find a less time consuming way to study that I focused on as many positive aspects of the device as I could. Like decisions characteristic of cognitive dissonance, the decision had alternatives I had to contend with. Two alternatives were passed up which were to buy an inexpensive voice mechanism to read the text material into the computer, or to buy nothing at all.

Of the four methods used to reduce dissonance, I used three. After making the decision to buy the device, I was skeptical about my purchase. Dissonance was created when I realized that I spent a lot of money, $200, and it was on something that was made only in Europe. To find information to support this purchase, I told myself that I would use cash I received for my birthday to pay for half of the expense, and thus not too much money would be taken out of the checking account. I tried to lessen the dissonance with further information by telling myself the device did have a return policy. I chose to focus on the positive aspects of the product instead of the negatives of the decision. I focused on the positives by telling myself the device would considerably cut down on the time it takes me to write out notes from my school books, and thus I could spend more time with my husband. When I found out the device did not work, I tried to lessen this negative aspect by reminding myself that my brother was going to give me a copy of his Microsoft 2000 program to replace my defective Microsoft '98 program. I tried not to blame myself for the inept device by telling myself it was not my fault the Microsoft program had a glitch in it. Finally, I degraded the alternatives and kept focusing on the negative that writing out notes from text books that take too long. My second alternative, which was to buy an inexpensive speaking/transcribing devices for computers, would not work either as it would not transcribe my voice and book notes as perfectly as the scanner. Overall, these cognitive devices helped to lessen the anxiety of making a bad decision.