

8 practical tools to assist you in saying NO!

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Mydtskov criteria

Named after a Danish jazz musician. To accept a gig, you should require more than one of the following: 1) Great music (fun project), 2) Great pay (funding/citations), and 3) Great people. As an example, you could do a fun project with horrible pay if it were with wonderful people, but you shouldn't do a boring project with horrible pay, even if it is with these wonderful people.

The “72-hour” rule

Before accepting a project, consider putting it on quarantine for 72 hours. Nothing is ever that urgent. And if you're still enthusiastic 72 hours later, the idea might be worth pursuing. This tool is particularly important if you are feeling very excited about an idea (and thus do not think clearly).

Tickbox optimization

How many tickboxes can you tick if you do this? If the answer is one, you might be better off pursuing something that solves multiple problems in one go.

JOMO!

“Joy (not fear) Of Missing Out”. Once a project is turned down, set time aside to actively (!) ponder about how happy you are that you are not doing it. It builds confidence for future decisions.

Senior input

Sometimes listening to the “village elders” makes you wiser. Senior researchers never complain about having missed out. In fact, Ken Rothman was recently quoted for “I've never regretted saying no”. If such brilliant people do not regret it, it might be worth trying.

Vision?

Have you and your colleagues agreed on a visionary statement? Will this project move you closer to that vision? If not, you should probably turn it down.

“To do” comparison

Before accepting a new project, take a look at your current list of projects and the list of (other) new ideas. The new project might sound interesting, but is it more interesting/valuable than what you already have going on? It should be, if you choose to pursue it, as your other projects will inevitably suffer from the competition.

Constant reminder

We all know we need to become better at saving time for what's truly important to us. And many of us need to be reminded constantly. A picture of the kids on the desk (or even better on the lock screen of your smartphone!), perhaps even with them looking sternly at you, makes you remember.