

HOW TO MAKE GRIT DECISIONS AND BUILD A GRIT LIST BY JON ACUFF

WHAT IS A GRIT DECISION?

If grit is stubbornness in the face of fear, how do we actually make decisions that reflect that? Metaphors involving stunning vistas and difficult golf shots are nice, but what does that look like on a Monday morning when you've got a difficult choice to make in the real world in your very real life? What does that look like when you're faced with a career choice that's not easy? What does it look like when you're chasing a dream that feels impossible at times?

In other words, if you're trying to move forward today and not regret it tomorrow, that's a grit decision. I believe every grit decision needs five things:

TIME

We think hustle (one of my key pieces of advice) has to mean fast, but it doesn't. The only way you can make grit decisions is if you give them the time they need. Though there will be sprint moments in any career, a year from now when you look back on a big decision, you'll want to know you gave it the time it deserved. Don't confuse hustle with rush.

COUNSEL

Lean on your relationships. Some of the worst decisions are made alone. If the only counsel you're keeping is your own, you're going to make some horrible choices. Who are your advocates? What have they said about the opportunity you're facing? Have you given them time to reflect on it, or are you rushing right by the wisdom they might offer?

You don't have to wait for perfect consensus from everyone you know before making a move. As Arthur Goldberg noted, "If Columbus had an advisory committee he would probably still be at the dock." But don't hide the decision you're trying to make from the people you trust. A year from now you'll be glad you made it as a team. If you doubt your choice later, they can remind you why you made it since they were part of it.

QUESTIONS

Always ask awesome questions about awesome opportunities. In our hope that something is too good to be true, we often don't ask hard enough questions. We skimp on due diligence and end up ignoring obvious warning signs. Every bad decision I've ever made has one thing in common – I thought it was a good decision at the time.

Give your counsel the chance to ask you hard questions by asking them one of your own. I tell my advocates about an opportunity I'm struggling with, and then I say, "What am I not seeing right now?" I know that despite my best intentions and ability, there's a side I'm probably missing.

KINDNESS

Give yourself permission to make wrong decisions, because guess what? You're going to. You're going to pick the wrong thing sometimes. You're going to give your decisions time, get counsel, ask lots of good questions, and still blow it. So am I. You'll never bat 1.000 when you reinvent your career.

We jump to the wrong job. We develop a skill that our industry stops valuing. We move our family across the country for a job that falls apart in six months. Break the tension of feeling like you're going to be perfect by giving yourself some kindness from the outset.

Excerpted from DO OVER: Rescue Monday, Reinvent Your Work, and Never Get Stuck.

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HONESTY

The worst part of regret is that when we look back on a decision we lie to ourselves. Equipped with the kind of information only hindsight can provide, we beat up our former selves for their stupidity. But that person in the past, the old you, didn't know what you know now. You couldn't have predicted that the boss who hired you for a new job would then leave, stranding you with a new boss who didn't like you. You're not a mind reader. Be honest about that. When you look back on a decision, remember you made that decision with the best information you had at the time.

TIME TO BUILD A GRIT LIST.

You may hope that reinventing your work means you'll never have to do things you don't like again. You'll be one of those people with dream jobs who spend 100% of their days on passions. You'll probably sail to the Galapagos Islands to study tortoises and have one of those Instagram accounts we all love/hate to follow. Just one sunset and tortoise after another as you enjoy the perfect life.

Of course that's not true. There's no such thing as a perfect job. There's no job where you only get to do the things you love doing. Those don't exist. As a doctor told me, "In every job, there's a rectal exam."

You're going to need what I call a "Grit List," a collection of things you hate doing but are critical to your career. I said "hate" although my mother always told me that was a horrible word. Instead I was taught to say, "I do not prefer cauliflower."

But we're not talking about albino broccoli right now. We're talking about hustle. About shaping our careers in such a way that we can capitalize on unexpected opportunities. About grinding our teeth, buckling down and doing all little things that add up to big careers. We're talking about grit.

Regardless of which stage you're in, a career ceiling, career bump, career jump or career opportunity, you'll have to do some things you don't love. You might not have to do as many later on in your career as you become established, but there will never be a time where you only do the things you like.

That's why we all need a Grit List, a short list of the things we grit our teeth and do regardless of how we feel. Instead of trying to trick ourselves into liking them, we admit we hate them, recognize the value of them and then commit to do them.

Email is on my grit list.

I can't stand email. It's never done. Every time I do it and feel good about emptying it out, it refills itself. I hate saying no to things, partially due to my fear of missing out, and every email feels like a chance for me to fail. I'm not very organized and the folders are overwhelming.

After years of trying to fall in love with email using systems and apps and methods and all manner of technology to beat it into submission, I now accept that we hate each other. That's OK. But guess what? My job requires email.

Responding to email is part of what it means to be a modern writer. Maybe if I was in my late 80s and called computers, "The computer," I could avoid ever using it. But I can't. I'm too young to make a play for pigeons as my mode of communication. Pigeons stopped expressing long ago.

So I admit I hate it and put it on my Grit List. Then I recognize the value. My inbox isn't just full of data. There are relationships in there. There are skills in there. How I respond to people reflects on my character. I don't get to say,

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“I want to invest a lot in relationships, but not via one of the most popular ways people communicate today.” I also get to hustle on unexpected opportunities if I stay on top of my email. I got to speak to one of the teams at Comedy Central because I responded to an email from one of their executives. We ended up becoming good friends.

On my Grit List I wrote the value of email (New opportunities, stronger relationships, chance to not be a luddite, etc.) Then I commit to do it. I don't need to love it to get it done. I just need to do it. With grit.

What would you put on your Grit List?

ONE MORE POINT ABOUT FEAR

Fear is coming. It's a consequence of actually doing something meaningful with your career.

If my new book were titled “How to Stay the Same” we wouldn't have to address fear. But it's titled “Do Over” and change is scary. That's OK. We all get scared. That's part of the price of reinventing your career. Most people won't pay it.

Don't be most people. Go with grit.

To pre-order Do Over visit Acuff.me/DoOver