decision clearing

WHAT THIS IS FOR

There are many reasons why a decision will not get out of the way, whether it is what to cook for dinner or whether to sell the house and move to Italy.

This decision clearing system gives you more clarity and gets you from stuck to your next step.

If a decision is too difficult to sort out, or you cannot find even a first, doable step to get you moving, page 03 helps you find out what is really standing in the way.

※ How to use page 02: one decision per sheet. Write it in one line, check one route, and fill in only that route, with dates. Still stuck? Page 03.

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TEMPLATE

NAME IT · WHAT DO I HAVE TO DECIDE?

☐ 01 · decide now

MY DECISION · THEN THE STEPS BELOW

☐ 02 · decide later

WHAT I NEED BEFORE I CAN DECIDE

I DECIDE ON THIS DATE, WITH OR WITHOUT IT

☐ 03 · park it

I CANNOT DECIDE THIS NOW, BECAUSE

I LOOK AT THIS AGAIN ON

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the steps

FOR 01 AND 02 · EVERY STEP WITH ITS DATE

THE STEP	DATE	DONE
		☐
		☐
		☐
		☐
		☐

is something else in the way?

YOU KNOW WHAT TO DECIDE, BUT THE STEP OR WHAT FOLLOWS FROM IT FRIGHTENS YOU, OR THE DECISION STIRS UP FEELINGS YOU AVOID · PAGE 03 HELPS YOU NAME IT

※ Fill in only the route you checked. A step that comes out of a step goes on the next free row. The decision stays one line on your list until every step is done.

the mechanism of being stuck

A decision stalls when the brain registers a cost in acting that outweighs the benefit it can see. The cost takes different forms: uncertainty, too many options, a mind too stretched to weigh anything, a feeling it wants to avoid, a load that was never yours, or a threat large enough to shut planning down. The brain avoids the cost now, and the relief reinforces the delay.

THE DECISION ITSELF

- ☐ Something is missing: a number, an answer, a conversation.
- ☐ You are waiting to feel certain, and that feeling only comes after you decide.
- ☐ There are too many options, and none stands out.
- ☐ It is someone else's decision.

THE STATE YOU ARE IN

- ☐ You are too stretched to weigh anything at all.

A FEELING IN FRONT OF IT

- ☐ You do not want to. It is dull, and your brain answers dull with later.
- ☐ You are afraid it goes wrong, or of how you will be judged.
- ☐ You are afraid of what you will find once you look.
- ☐ It is too big and shapeless to see where to begin.
- ☐ You have left it too long, and now it needs an explanation.
- ☐ There is no good option. Every choice takes something you care about.
- ☐ It is not up to you. Someone else decides, and you carry the worry.
- ☐ The loss is real, and each step makes it more so.

THE ARRANGEMENT AROUND IT

- ☐ It was never really yours, and it keeps coming back.

THE WEIGHT OF IT

- ☐ It frightens you so much that you cannot think straight.

※ Effort weighed as a cost: Kool, McGuire, Rosen & Botvinick, 2010. Stress and the prefrontal cortex: Arnsten, 2009. Postponement as short-term relief: Sirois & Pychyl, 2013.

it's brain vs to-do list

WHERE THIS COMES FROM

Decision clearing is one method from It's Brain vs To-Do List, which sorts everything on your list by what stands between you and done.

If a decision needs deeper work, or you want help with what stands in the way, you will find the answers in the book. Each obstacle on page 03 is addressed there, with what is happening and how to get past it.

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