10 Thinking Tools for Better Decisions

THE BIG IDEA

Clear thinking is a set of tools, not a talent. Test your reasoning against reality, plan for failure, and make the right move the easy one.

Tools for deciding

Use these before you commit time or money.

01 **Judge the decision, not the outcome.**
A good call can lose to bad luck. Keep making it. A bad call that worked out was luck. Don't repeat it.

02 **Fix the weakest link first.**
In a step-by-step process, the weakest step breaks the chain. Steps at 95%, 70% and 95%? Put your hours into the 70% step.

03 **Pair every target with a check.**
Pay on tickets closed and you get sloppy closes. Track tickets reopened too. If one rises as the other worsens, it's being gamed.

04 **Learn why a rule exists before you cut it.**
Every odd step in a process cost someone time or money to create. Find the reason first, then decide.

05 **Weigh signals by who would say them.**
"Send me the details" comes from buyers and non-buyers alike. "Can you invoice us quarterly?" almost only comes from buyers.

Tools for following through

Most plans fail in the doing. These close the gap.

01 **Pad every estimate.**
Your plan is a best case. 9 in 10 of 258 big transport projects ran over budget. Pad timelines 1.5 to 3x.

02 **Run a premortem.**
Before you start, say: "It's a week from now and this failed. Why?" The past tense gets specific answers, not vague worries.

03 **Set a five-minute timer.**
Start the task you've avoided. It's either done, not worth doing, or bigger than you thought. All three are wins.

04 **Write "When X happens, I will do Y."**
Use a trigger you can't miss, like an alarm, not "3 p.m." Across 94 studies, this raised goal success.

05 **Ask AI to attack your plan.**
"Assume this is a mistake. Give me the three strongest reasons not to do it." Then write the final decision in your own words.

> "'I just won't do that bad thing that I always do.' Well, it's not a plan. It is a hope."
>
> Nick Saraev

DO THIS WEEK

- ☐ Run a premortem on your next big decision. One page, past tense.
- ☐ Pick one number your team is paid on. Add a second number that shows if it's being gamed.
- ☐ Set a 5-minute timer on the task you've avoided longest.

Ask weekly: Am I judging this call by the decision, or by how it turned out?

Source: Nick Saraev, *YouTube*, "How to Think Clearly In The Era Of AI: Full Course (5 Hours)"