

CULTUREBOX

Before You Accept Any Invitation ...

You must ask yourself this question.

BY DAVID PLOTZ

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Vanquish invitational indecision with this one simple trick.

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What an honor! You have been asked to appear on a panel, to keynote a conference, to advise a celebrity, to be publicly acclaimed. Perhaps you have been offered a plump check. Perhaps you’ve even been promised a prize! Of course you’re flattered. Of course you accept, because you have so much time to prepare. After all, this thing isn’t happening until October. It’s next year. It’s in 2018. It’s so far in the future, you’ll probably be dead by then.

You’ve made a terrible mistake.

Here’s what will happen. Though the engagement seems infinitely far away today, it will eventually, inevitably, be a week away. Then it’s a day away. And you still haven’t written the speech you need to write. You still have to make a hotel reservation and buy a train ticket and find a baby sitter and apologize to your sister for missing her birthday dinner and beg Dan to cover for you in a meeting. (Sorry, Dan.) The opportunity that sparkled so brightly when they flattered you into it six months ago isn’t gleaming anymore. It’s just a gigantic hassle.

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But I have the miracle solution. (To give credit where it’s due, this tidbit was passed along to me by my wife, Hanna Rosin, and her friend, *New Yorker* staff writer Margaret Talbot.) Anytime anyone invites you to do *anything*, ask yourself this question before you accept: *Would I do it tomorrow?*

That’s it—those five words. Not: Would I do it on some theoretical day in the future? This is the crucial question: Would I upend whatever I am doing tomorrow so that I can go *there* and do *that*?

Are they paying you enough to skip your daughter’s soccer game *tomorrow*? Is the panel interesting enough that you don’t mind asking your colleague to cover for you, *tomorrow*? Is the conference important enough to your career that you would blow off your college roommate’s visit, which is *tomorrow*. When you get the invitation, pay no attention at all to its far-flung date: Move it mentally to tomorrow.

Tomorrow makes decisions simple. Meeting the president? Of course I would do that tomorrow! You’re proposing to pay me that much? Then I would speak to your annual meeting of anesthesiologists tomorrow. Driving to North Carolina to give a speech? Not tomorrow. Serve on that important-sounding committee? If I have to do it tomorrow, no way.

Don’t thank me for this life-altering advice. Just pass it on. And do it today.

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