USING YOUR TIME WISELY TO ACHIEVE YOUR CAREER GOALS: STRATEGICALLY SAYING YES AND NO

Josée Dupuis
Professor and Chair
Department of Biostatistics
Boston University School of Public Health
Outline

- When to say no
  - What are your career goals?
    - Always answer yes/no with these goals in mind
  - Josée’s decision tree
- How to say no
- Examples
Career Goals

- Set short-term and long-term career goals
  - May involve promoting the career of others!
- Always evaluate demands on your time with respect to these goals
  - The benefits may not always be direct
Josée’s decision tree

How long will it take?

< 5 min

Do it!

> 5 min

Will it help reach career goals?

Yes

Estimate time commitment then double your estimate (or include a wide confidence interval)

No

Fun and benefit others?

Yes

Take honest look at your calendar before accepting

No

Consider declining

Take honest look at your calendar before accepting
Five-Minute Tasks

- May not see immediate benefit, but accumulation of these 5 minute tasks will pay off
  - May need a favor in the future
  - May benefit people you don’t know who may help your career in the future
  - Being a “good citizen” often pays off in the long run
- One word of caution: “do it” always comes with the caveat that accepting will not be detrimental to your career
Help Reach Career Goals?

- Very loosely defined
  - Could have direct benefits
    - Invited talk at a national meeting will increase your visibility and visibility of your department/school/university
    - Joining a research team leads to publication, grants, etc.
  - Could have potential/indirect benefits
    - Networking event where you may or may not meet people who will help advance your career
    - Opportunity to develop new skills
Fun and Benefit Others?

- Some tasks may not benefit you, but may benefit others
  - Examples: extra teaching, mentoring
- My rule of thumb
  - If it will take < 1 day and I will enjoy doing it, I will not say no automatically
    - Take into consideration how busy I am, if there is someone else available who could do it better, etc.
  - If it will take > 1 day and will not help reach my career goals, I tend to decline
Other considerations

- Is now the right time?
  - Will the opportunity be available in the future?
  - Will I gain greater benefits from saying ‘yes’ in a few weeks/months/years?

- Is there someone else available?
  - Do I bring unique skills to the task?
  - Could someone else perform the task?
Other considerations

- Of course, who is asking will influence your answer
  - Not explicitly stated in Josée’s decision tree
  - Included under “help reach career goals”
    - Doing a favor for someone who can help you reach your career goals is beneficial to your career, even if the task itself is not
How to say no*

- Acknowledge the person and his or her interest in engaging you.
- Identify the importance of the task.
- State with regret that you cannot do the task asked of you.
- Wrap up with a positive wish for success. You may offer suggestions of an idea or another person to help if doing so does not distract you from your priorities.

*Borrowed with permission from N. Karl Haden, President and CEO of Academic of Academic Leadership.
How to say no

- If possible, suggest someone else who could do the task
  - I am not available, but I think Dr. X would do a great job
  - This includes invitations to be a referee. The person soliciting a review may be asked to write a letter of recommendation for you some day, or be on a committee deciding on an award for which you are a nominee!

- If the time is not right, say ‘no, not now’ instead of ‘no’
  - You can negotiate for more time
    - E.g. Cannot do this in the next week, but could do it next month
  - Give an indication on when you think would be a good time or simply say “please keep me in mind for future opportunities’
Examples

- Guest lecture in a course
- Serving on a committee
- Leading a task force
- Serving on a study section
- Writing a review article
- Associate Editor of a journal
- Other examples?