

## **When in Doubt... Leave it Out**

*By Michelle LaBrosse, PMP®, Chief Cheetah and Founder of Cheetah Learning*

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Imagine you are sitting in your car, wondering, *what shall I do for dinner?* Shall I pick up Chinese food to go? Meet my friend Sally for dinner, or go home and cook dinner myself while watching American Idol? All of a sudden you are sitting there, frozen in time, unable to make a decision about what to do for dinner. And this is one of the easier choices in life.

Don't be upset. Indecision can happen to anyone, and often occurs when you least expect it. The pause that takes place when you are in the midst of making any important (or not so important) decision is like a comma in your life, separating one idea from the next, and one task from another. And like anyone who has passed the third grade knows, the comma rule states: "When in Doubt, Leave it Out!" This rule can be applied similarly to life's frozen moments of indecision. When it doubt, leave that pause out.

Now, I'm not encouraging you to stop making decisions all together. I'm talking about the decisions that take an inordinately long time to process. Some of the reasons that we succumb to prolonged indecision are the following:

### **Parkinson's Law: Work Expands to Fill the Time Available for its Completion.**

When you have to make a decision, give yourself a time limit on when you will have to come up with your final choice. Some of the hardest decisions are the ones that linger because they have no time limit. You wouldn't tell your project team to decide who will be creating the WBS for various tasks without giving them a deliverable date. Use this same discipline in our own decision making process by giving yourself a time frame in which to make a decision, and holding yourself accountable to this.

**Too Many Options.** Options are fantastic when you are in an ice cream parlor. Options can rear their ugly head when they are abundant and when the benefits of each are unclear. In the case of ice cream, you are pretty much guaranteed to be satisfied no matter which option you choose. But what if you are deciding among various vendors to fulfill a certain task of a project, and you have so many that it's hard to see the forest through the trees anymore? This is when you have to develop a systematic rating system to help you objectively assess your options without getting lost in details.

**Tasks are of Equal Importance.** The typical rule of thumb for tasks at hand is to do the most important and urgent tasks first, and work your way down, putting out fires as you go. A dilemma arises when you have a variety of tasks to perform, and they all have around the same urgency level (whether they are all of high urgency or all of low urgency). There you find yourself again, frozen in indecision, wondering

what you should do first. The bad news is that there is no right answer to this question. The good news is that there is no wrong answer, either. If you have a list of tasks to do that have the same priority, convert your anxiety into action and just START.

**Waiting for More Information.** Many times we postpone making decisions because we are waiting to gather more information. I have always followed the philosophy of “Ready, Fire, Aim.” In most cases, you will never have all the information that you need to make a decision, but rather need to use the knowledge and resources that you have to do the best you can, and modify your tasks as you go. The hardest part of most tasks is just getting started, so stop waiting, and start doing!

And remember, decisions made too soon tend to have to get made again. Make your decisions when the time is right to make that decision and not before. Tune into how and when you make your best decisions. Use this information to help you learn how to make better decisions.

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### About the Author:



Michelle LaBrosse, PMP, is an entrepreneurial powerhouse with a penchant for making success easy, fun and fast. She is the founder of [Cheetah Learning](#), the [author](#) of the [Cheetah Success Series](#), and a prolific [blogger](#) whose mission is to bring Project Management to the masses.

Cheetah Learning is a virtual company with 100 employees, contractors, and licensees worldwide. To date, more than 30,000 people have become “Cheetahs” using Cheetah Learning’s innovative Project Management and accelerated learning techniques.

Recently honored by the Project Management Institute (PMI®), Cheetah Learning was named Professional Development Provider of the Year at the 2008 PMI® Global Congress. A dynamic keynote speaker and industry thought leader, Michelle was

previously recognized by PMI as one of the 25 Most Influential Women in Project Management in the world.

Michelle's articles have appeared in over 100 publications and web sites around the world. Her monthly column, the [Know How Network](#) is carried by over 400 publications, and her monthly newsletter goes out to more than 50,000 people.

She is a graduate of the Harvard Business School's Owner President Manager's (OPM) program and also holds engineering degrees from Syracuse University and the University of Dayton.

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