

The Dossier

CASE FILE

Every decision is a case. Investigate it before you close it.

HOW TO USE THIS FILE

Use one dossier for each important business decision. Fill it in on screen (this PDF is fillable) or print it and write by hand. First pick the case class, then work the steps in order. Keep every finished dossier. Over time they become a record of how you think, and the best way to get better at deciding.

STEP 0 · PICK THE CASE CLASS

Class I · Routine

Two-way door, low cost. Easy to undo.

TIME: MINUTES

STEPS D, E, R

Class II · Significant

Costly but reversible. Mistakes can be fixed.

TIME: AN HOUR OR TWO

ALL BUT I

Class III · Critical

One-way door. Hard or impossible to undo.

TIME: DAYS + A SECOND OPINION

ALL SEVEN STEPS

THE SEVEN STEPS

D	Define	Write the real question, your options, a deadline and what success looks like.
O	Outside view	Describe it in the third person. Check how cases like it usually turn out.
S	Sort evidence	Split facts from assumptions. Test the shakiest assumption cheaply.
S	Scenarios	Best, worst and likely. Ask "and then what?" Run a premortem.
I	Interrogate	Write the strongest case against your plan. Get someone to attack it.
E	Execute	Make the call, set tripwires, and tell the people affected.
R	Review	On a set date, grade your reasoning separately from the outcome.

RULES OF THE METHOD

- Every Class III decision gets a full dossier.
- No dossier is closed without a review date.
- Set tripwires when you decide, not after things go wrong.
- Grade the reasoning first, then the outcome.

Case file

CASE CLASS

☐ Class I · Routine☐ Class II · Significant☐ Class III · Critical

Define the question

What problem am I really solving? Leave room for more than yes or no.

THE REAL QUESTION

OPTIONS, INCLUDING DOING NOTHING

DECIDE BY

SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE



Outside view

What would a new owner do? How do cases like this usually go?

IN THE THIRD PERSON (USE YOUR NAME)

BASE RATE: HOW THIS USUALLY GOES FOR OTHER BUSINESSES



Sort the evidence

What can I prove? What am I only assuming?

FACTS

ASSUMPTIONS

SHAKIEST ASSUMPTION, AND HOW I'LL TEST IT



Run the scenarios

Can I survive the worst case? And then what?

BEST CASE

WORST CASE

MOST LIKELY

AND THEN WHAT?

PREMORTEM: IT'S A YEAR FROM NOW AND THIS FAILED. WHY?



Interrogate

What's the strongest argument against my plan?

THE STRONGEST CASE AGAINST

FOR THIS TO WORK, WHAT HAS TO BE TRUE?

WHO ATTACKED THE PLAN (REQUIRED FOR CLASS III)



Execute

What's my call, and what would make me rethink it?

MY CALL

TRIPWIRES: IF ____ BY ____, WE RETHINK.

WHO NEEDS TO KNOW, AND HOW



Review

Was my reasoning sound with what I knew then?

REVIEW ON

REVIEWED ON

WHAT I EXPECTED

WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENED

DID A TRIPWIRE GO OFF? WHAT DID I DO?

DECISION QUALITY GRID · CHECK ONE SQUARE

GOOD OUTCOME

BAD OUTCOME

SOUND REASONING

☐**Earned**

Do it again. Note what made it work.

☐**Bad luck**

Keep the process. Could a tripwire have caught it?

WEAK REASONING

☐**Dumb luck**

Most dangerous square. Fix the process now.

☐**Lesson**

Find the step you skipped. Write it down.

THE ONE LESSON I'M KEEPING

Case closed. File this dossier with the others, including the embarrassing ones. They teach the most.