

Why Saying ‘Yes’ Is Your Best Career Move in the Age of AI

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Key Takeaways

- Saying yes to challenges builds momentum, visibility and lasting growth.
- Proactive curiosity and initiative are key to standing out professionally.
- Embracing AI and change is essential to staying relevant today.

The biggest opportunities rarely look like opportunities at all – they often show up as inconvenient or uncomfortable, making them tempting to turn down. But saying yes in those moments can change the entire course of your career.

I learned this firsthand years ago, when an urgent customer issue at our company required immediate travel to Spain. One by one, the more senior, logical choices all said no. I wasn't the obvious candidate, but someone needed to step up. That yes became a turning point: it showed me that even without all the answers, you can figure things out. It also opened doors to opportunities I wouldn't have had otherwise.

As the CEO of that company now, it's a lesson I've continued to embrace and share with others: saying yes is one of the fastest ways to grow – helping you stand out, build momentum and stay relevant. And today, that imperative has never been greater.

As AI reshapes the workforce, the pace of change is accelerating beyond what traditional career playbooks can keep up with. Skills in AI-exposed roles are changing 66% faster than in other jobs, while the 'half-life' of many skills has dropped to under five years. That means much of what you know today may already be outdated.

In this environment, a willingness to take on new opportunities and build your skillset has become essential. Whether you're leading a company or just starting out, here's why saying yes is the growth enabler your career needs.

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Saying yes helps you differentiate

In a competitive job market, standing out is essential. But that doesn't stop after you land the role. Advancement comes from continuing to find ways to shine. Research shows people who are proactive at work are more satisfied with their careers and more likely to be promoted.

Early on, this proactivity can come from curiosity and context-building. If trips or promotions aren't available, take the initiative to find a mentor or learn through conversations with peers about how they're getting ahead.

One of the best ways to set yourself apart is something that most people surprisingly go their whole careers never doing: ask your boss, *"What's your biggest challenge right now? What's keeping you up at night?"* This can yield powerful insights into what's relevant at the next level and create an opening to help solve problems that truly matter.

One of my favorite passages is part of a Carl Holmes essay, highlighting the words: *"...and then some."* I keep it by my desk as a reminder that differentiation often happens at the

margins. The people who say yes to going a little further – who deliver context along with analysis, who anticipate needs instead of just reacting – get remembered. Those extra steps are what make you the go-to person when opportunities arise. Even if the payoff isn't immediate, the reputational capital and relationships you build can open doors down the road.

Saying yes builds momentum

The best careers aren't built on a single yes – they grow over time like dividends, compounding with every opportunity you take on.

By the time you hit mid-career, leveling up is about maintaining steady progress, even in the face of personal obligations. Ultimately, you own your career, and it's up to you to advance it.

For me, that turning point came when an international development role opened up. Taking it would mean being gone 50–70% of the time, often missing important moments at home. It was a fork in the road: stay on the finance track, or broaden my prospects. I chose the latter. The reward? Cultural fluency, market understanding and leadership experience I never could have gained from a spreadsheet. That yes also set me up for an executive role down the line.

But even when you're seemingly "at the top", growth comes from continuing to stay open and curious. Case in point: after I became CEO, many colleagues urged me to join YPO, a global network for executives. For years, I resisted – insisting I was too busy. When I finally said yes, I realized I should have joined years earlier. The experience gave me access to a trusted peer group, fresh perspectives on my own business and above all, the chance to support others.

After all, as a leader, it's important to remember that saying yes isn't just about your career. Empowering others by

creating stretch opportunities, supporting experiments and amplifying wins is equally important. Not only does this help increase employee engagement, it also amplifies momentum across your team.

Saying yes ensures ongoing relevance

Today, there is no greater catalyst for saying yes than AI. In fact, those hesitating to embrace it risk rapidly losing ground. Nvidia's CEO warned that while AI may not take your job, someone who uses it will.

At my company we've been leveraging AI within our entertainment technology for years. But like many others, we're now exploring how to implement newer AI tools and capabilities across our operations. That's why when a team member recently came forward with a promising solution they had developed as a side project, I applauded their initiative, encouraged them to share it with our AI leads, and asked how we could make it visible to others. That small yes turned into a growth opportunity for them and the entire organization.

It also reinforced a larger truth: saying yes to AI isn't just about learning a new tool. It's about building the judgment and expertise needed to use and implement it responsibly. After all, AI's well-documented hallucinations require not only fact checking, but discerning assessment backed by real-world experience and deep domain knowledge – the very kind you build from years of saying yes to new challenges and opportunities.

While playing it safe may be tempting, now more than ever standing still equates to decline. George Land's book *Grow or Die* puts it bluntly: you're either advancing or you're falling behind. In the end, it's simple: say yes, keep moving and the rewards will follow.

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