The 10 Slack Commandments

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Summary

Lots of us are struggling with how we use Slack. This document proposes 10 Slack Commandments to make Slack more productive and less distracting, plus 5 bonus suggestions.

What problems are we trying to solve?

- The way we use Slack today…
  - Creates distraction and makes it harder to do deep work
  - Creates pressure to always be on and to read everything
  - Doesn't make it clear when to use Slack vs. email or other mediums, so all communication defaults to Slack even when it shouldn't.

How will we know if we solved the problems?

- The way we will use Slack in the future…
  - Minimizes distraction and makes it easier to do deep work
  - Minimizes pressure to always be on and to read everything
  - Makes it clear when to use Slack vs. email or other mediums.

What problems are we NOT trying to solve?

- We are not trying to make everyone use Slack exactly the same way.
- We are not trying to move all possibly useful information out of Slack.

- We are not trying to eliminate every possible advantage from reading and engaging in Slack.

The 10 Slack Commandments

These are all about how we communicate with each other.

1) **Choose which medium to use based on level of urgency and importance.** If I need something now or outside of work hours: text or call; if I need something quickly: Slack DM or @ mention with timeline; if I need something on your time: Slack DM or @ mention with no timeline; if I need something formally: email. More guidance on [when to use calls, Slack, or email or ClickUp here](). Still more notes on [Internal Communication Tools and Systems used at Decent here](). Also consider importance: Slack is NOT the right forum for communicating or codifying important decisions that everyone should see. Send an email to team@decent.com instead.

2) **Leave Slack open during your working hours so you can see notifications come in.** You can use Slack Preferences or channel-specific settings to get notified about all new messages, or only when you get direct messages (DMs) and @ mentions. Keep your Slack status up to date so people know when you're available, and [sync your status with your calendar]() so people can see when you're in meetings. [See this page]() on how to set your Slack status and availability. Only use Pause Notifications / Do Not Disturb (DND) for up to two hours at a time, to make sure you're not missing something important. Try to respect colleagues' DND, but if someone has notifications paused during their local work hours and you really need to reach them, it's okay to send them a DM and override DND.

3) **Don't expect work responses outside of colleagues' local work hours.** If you absolutely need something now, text or call - but do this as sparingly as possible. When possible, use "Send later" in email and in Slack (which doesn't support it in threads, unfortunately) so your requests come in during colleagues' local work hours.

4) **If you need someone to read something, DM them, or @ mention them (even in an active conversation).** Don't feel you need to read anything unless you are DMed or @ mentioned. @ mentioning someone in a DM isn't necessary and doesn't do anything (we checked). Use group @ bullhorns sparingly, if at all:
   a) **@everyone** notifies every person in the #general channel,
   b) **@channel** notifies all members of a channel, and
   c) **@here** notifies only the active members of a channel.

5) **If you need something on a specific timeline, state when you need it.** When possible, explain why you need it then. If no timeline is stated, assume anyone @ mentioned will reply on their time. It's nice but optional to reply within a few hours when you're @ mentioned with no timeline during work hours.

6) **Use threads to make conversations easier to follow.** Use the "Also send to #channel" checkbox sparingly - if you want specific people to read your message, @ mention them in the thread instead. [See this page](#) on how to use threads in Slack.

7) **Less (messages) is more, especially in group threads and channels.** Re-read your message before you hit Send. Each message should be a full thought, even when you're excited. When you have a question or request, write it all out before sending (no "Hi" sneak attacks). Consider using reaction emojis to respond when no message is needed.

8) **Don't start a new channel when an existing channel will do, and don't start a private channel when a public channel will do.** It's better to have fewer inboxes than more inboxes, and it's better for information to be transparent than hidden. If you find yourself starting a group DM, consider creating a channel instead. It will allow you to add additional people to the conversation later if needed.

9) **If you think Slack is the wrong medium, always speak up.** "This conversation seems like it will take more than 5 minutes, should we have a call?" "I need some time to think about this, can you send me an email and I'll get back to you tomorrow?" "Next time you need something urgent, can you text or call me?" "Now that we've made a decision, where should we document it outside of Slack?" Clear communication is good communication.

10) **Have fun!** Slack is great for /giphy, memes, and celebratory news. Read anything you're interested in. In channels like #random and #memes and #music, do what you like. But stay away from #teeth. You've been warned.

Bonus Suggestions

These are all about how to make Slack better for you.

1) **Consider updating your notification settings (globally or in certain channels) to only alert you for DMs and @ mentions.** Configuring notifications is better than muting channels, because if you get @ mentioned in a channel you've muted, the red badge for @ mentions still appears but you don't get notified. [See this page](#) for help on configuring notifications.

2) **Leave channels you don't care about.** If no one is using a channel you created, archive it. You can always bring it back.

3) **Pause notifications for up to 2 hours when you need to focus.** You can use "Notification schedule" in Slack Preferences to set regular times in advance.

4) **If you aren't sure who to ask, post questions and requests in public channels.** Make sure to @ mention anyone you need to read them.

5) **Consider batch-reading Slack channels once or twice a day outside of your DMs and @ mentions.** If you see a question you have the time and ability to answer, go for it. One team, one dream.