

# YES, BUT

THE UNHOLY POWER OF TWO WORDS AND HOW THEY DRIVE THE WORLD AND US INTO STAGNATION

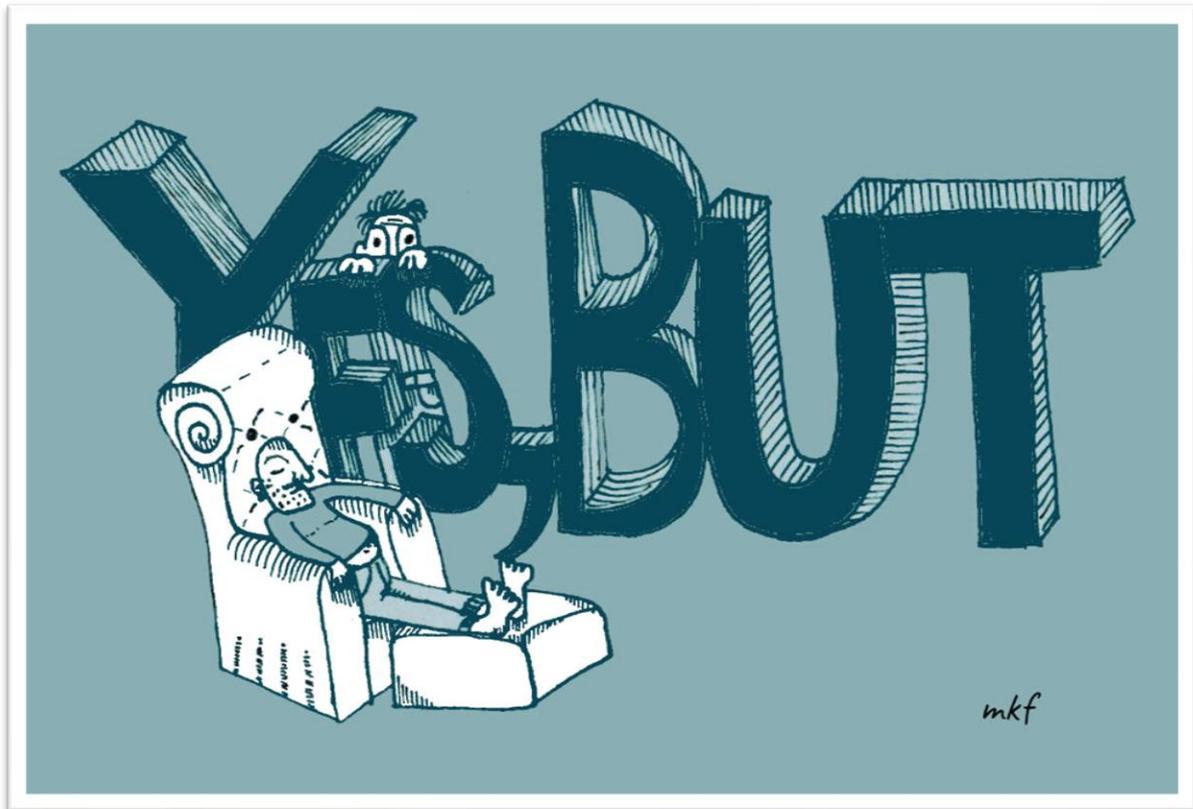


Illustration by [mutzikatzifrau](#)

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The world turns and we turn with it. Our everyday life is anything but standstill: we always have a lot to do, endlessly long task lists, and a feeling of constant rotation. And yet so many things - so fundamentally important - remain untouched, unnoticed, and in stagnation. One of the reasons for this: two little words! Two words that seem so harmlessly inconspicuous, independent of each other. Someone somewhere has shouted **YES, BUT** and put everything on standby.

**YES, BUT** has crept into our everyday culture of discussion, hardly noticed, and has a decisive influence on every topic. We find them on boardrooms, on the political stage as well as in debating clubs and at the regulars' table in every pub. With this contribution we want to sharpen the view on the word combination **YES, BUT** and encourage reflection. In the hope that we can free ourselves and our discourses from stagnation and break new ground.

Our primary concern in considering the problem is a more ethical and appreciative leadership, which we prevent through an inflationary use of the word **YES, BUT**.

**YES, BUT** is not appreciative, does not pave the way for a dignified treatment of fellow human beings and nature. We need transparency and a lifting of the great heavy carpet under which countless wrong decisions fueled by **YES, BUT** have been swept. It is time to clean up, to replace every **BUT** with an **AND**, to approach grievances in this way and to gradually clear away our emotional and very real mountains of rubbish.

## **YES, BUT ACCELERATES CLIMATE CHANGE**



We all know about the risks of climate change. Change is necessary. Not tomorrow, certainly not the day after tomorrow, but now. We are gradually destroying our environment and ultimately ourselves as well. The list of climate sins is long, they need to be tackled, time is pressing, action is needed. Actions that are repeatedly blocked by the disastrous power of **YES, BUT**.

An example? Cruise ships. Every cruise produces tons of CO<sub>2</sub> particles and nitrogen oxide emissions. The majority of ships run on poisonous heavy fuel oil and consume disproportionate amounts of energy even when at rest.

**YES.** All well documented<sup>1</sup>. Enough reasons to push forward regulations, to question the concept of holiday travel fundamentally and, as a consumer, to specifically consider environmental factors when choosing a cruise ship. The Süddeutsche Zeitung<sup>2</sup> was of the same opinion.

No sooner had the article<sup>3</sup> been published on Facebook then followers eagerly hammered into their keyboards. A flood of comments shot through the social media channel, in principle approving,

**BUT.** Then this followed:

**...THE CELEBRITIES GET TO FLY ON A PRIVATE JET, AND I HAVE TO GIVE UP MY HOLIDAY HAPPINESS?**  
**...THE TANKERS ARE EVEN WORSE POLLUTERS**  
**...IT IS UNFAIR. WE ALWAYS HAVE TO PAY FOR OUR LITTLE ENJOYMENTS.**  
**...WHY MUST I CHANGE AS AN INDIVIDUAL?**

<sup>1</sup> <https://utopia.de/ratgeber/kreuzfahrten-kreuzfahrtschiffe/>

<sup>2</sup> Daily newspaper from Germany, literally translated „South German Newspaper“

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/reise/leserdiskussion-klimawandel-sind-kreuzfahrten-noch-vertretbar-1.4416835>

The points are all valid in and of themselves. Each individual can, may and should be included in the discussion about the sense and benefits of cruise shipping. But what happens to the discourse if they are initiated by a **YES, BUT**?

The discussion on how to minimize the impact of cruise ships on climate change and the environment is slowed down, in the worst case brought to a complete standstill. We are putting the **YES, BUT** brake on because we do not want to move. Because otherwise we would have to leave our comfort zone. We point our fingers at the others, let them move first. The problem: that others do exactly the same. And there is no advancement.

**YES, BUT** becomes a saboteur, cancels out everything that was said before, acts as blotting paper and will have fatal consequences if we do not stop using it in problem-solving processes. **YES, BUT** may erase the discussion, making the correction of serious problems impossible.

Let us reflect together! In private or business life we have to be very careful in using these two words. The toxic combination of **YES** and **BUT** would be so easy to undo. Instead of wiping out discussions, it is enough to eliminate **BUT** and replace it with an **AND**.

## YES, AND IS THE ANTIDOTE TO YES, BUT

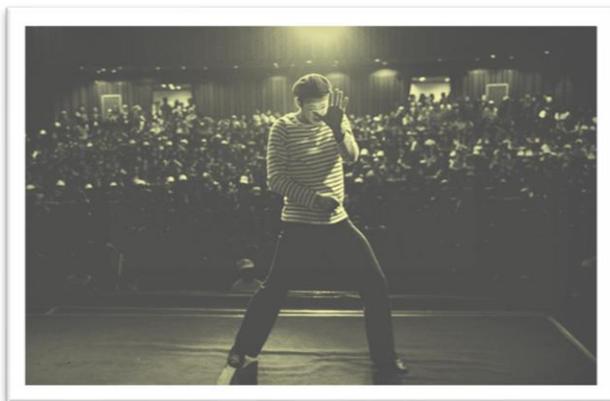
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*YES, cruise ships have a significant negative impact on the environment and our climate **AND** so do tankers. Let's tackle both.*

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Rising from the soft couch of cherished habits will be necessary in order not to suffocate in the end under postponed and erased discourses.

Objections are good and right; they sharpen our view with a change of perspective and ideally even advance our understanding. However, it is necessary to remain factual. Especially as leaders we must not stop discussions, sabotage them, or hinder any progress. Because leading is motion, not stagnation.



The concept of **YES, AND** originates from improvisational theatre, and in recent years has changed the way executives and teams communicate across industries for the better. Karen Hough, CEO of ImprovEdge, calls **YES, BUT** the evil twin of **YES, AND**<sup>4</sup>. She argues for **YES, BUT** to be replaced by **YES, AND**, so that it might be used as a powerful tool for collaboration, negotiation and effective communication.

<sup>4</sup> Karen Hough, "Yes, But" - The Evil Twin to "Yes, And" [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/yes-but-the-evil-twin-to-\\_b\\_5669640?guccounter=1](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/yes-but-the-evil-twin-to-_b_5669640?guccounter=1)

When the **YES, BUT** is eliminated from discussions and negotiations and instead **YES, AND** is used, positive engagement, appreciation, and support are conveyed. This simple tool creates effective cooperation in times of conflict and lifts the spirits in difficult times. It is precisely this **YES, AND** mentality that we need not only in companies, but also on a global, political, and social level. Only then will we find the way out of stagnation and towards move solution-oriented attitudes.

Too theoretical? Let us imagine a fictitious company team meeting:

*Person A suggests new and efficient tools in the virtual workspace. She has invested a lot of time and energy in extensive research and delivers a clear presentation.*

*Person B applauds. "YES, these are really great ideas. Well done, A!"*

*Person A is happy, feels motivated and confirmed.*

*Person B adds: "... BUT now is not the time."*

*The corners of A's mouth fall down, A is disappointed, and has the feeling that her work was in vain.*

Over. Full stop. Period. **YES, BUT** hit the brakes. Not just on the conversation, but on the enthusiasm and determination to do something, to tackle problems and solve them. Person A gets thrown back, discouraged. The fronts harden.

Even though it is difficult, let us imagine that the same conversation would be conducted with **YES, AND** instead of **YES, BUT**:

*Person B "YES, these are great ideas. AND we should think about when the right time for implementation is. We're going to have to do a lot of things here to make workflows more efficient, even if it's going to take some effort."*

**YES, AND** connects. Traditional with new, the opposing side with its own, the separated with the whole. In a globally networked world like ours, linking these common denominators are absolutely necessary for positive progress. Anything else is completely counterproductive.

### THE MAGNOLIATREE TIP

Try it out. For practice, start a conversation with a counterpart of your choice. First, answer every argument your counterpart makes with a **YES, BUT**. Then start the discourse again from the beginning and replace each **YES, BUT** with a **YES, AND**. You will be surprised by the insights you gain from this.

# YES, BUT IS POISONING COMMUNICATION



An excursion into the theory of communication

## YES, BUT DEVALUATES

According to Paul Watzlawick the content aspect receives the task of conveying information. The relationship aspect provides information about how the relationship is perceived by the recipient. With regard to the transfer to the communication situation it can be said that there is no purely informative communication. A YES, BUT often gives the recipient the feeling of not being taken seriously.

## YES, BUT OPENS BACK DOORS

YES, BUT is a perfect way to get around a back door. Laws, rules, regulations, directives are created, at the end of which a YES, BUT is almost always given. Exceptions must remain manageable and must not make the rule ad absurdum. In companies clear rules without an overriding YES, BUT are absolutely necessary for long-term economic success.

## YES, BUT MAKES US STAGNATE

Especially people who do not like to leave their comfort zone often use the word combination YES, BUT. By saying YES, BUT, one refuses to solve problems, stops progress and creates blockades. People who say YES, BUT do not like to dare and get stuck in stagnation.

## YES, BUT DELETES

A YES, BUT in extreme cases can become blotting paper and completely cancels out every thing said before. Saboteurs deliberately use the disastrous power of the two words to cancel out discussions, make them look unnecessary and, above all, to erase them, even though they are aware that it is not possible to erase the problems by refusing to discuss them.



Words - written or spoken - not only convey content, but also values and attitudes, are an expression of unconscious imprints.