

Art of saying no

Experience, Human Nature



Learn the Art of Saying NO “ NO” is a two-letter word but one of the most powerful words in leadership, management, and career growth. Learning to say No when you really want to is one of the important skills in work survival. It is not a negative mindset of avoiding work.

Instead, it is a way of gaining control over your work and personal life, making work fit into your purpose of life, and seeking fulfillment and job satisfaction. Story: The Man and His Two Wives In the old days, when men were allowed to have many wives, a middle-aged Man had one wife that was old and one that was young; each loved him very much, and desired to see him like herself. Now the Man's hair was turning grey, which the young Wife did not like, as it made him look too old for her husband. So every night she used to comb his hair and pick out the white ones. But the elder Wife saw her husband growing grey with great pleasure, for she did not like to be mistaken for his mother. So every morning she used to arrange his hair and pick out as many of the black ones as she could. The consequence was the Man soon found himself entirely bald.

Moral: Yield to all and you will soon have nothing to yield. He that submits his principles to the influence and caprices of opposite parties will end in having no principles at all. Quotable Quotes: “ What is a rebel? A man who says no. ” ... Albert Camus “ 'Then you should say what you mean,' the March Hare went on.

'I do,' Alice hastily replied; 'at least – at least I mean what I say – that's the same thing, you know. ' 'Not the same thing a bit! ' said the Hatter. 'Why, you might just as well say that I see what I eat is the same thing as I eat

what I see! ” ... Lewis Carroll “ If a lady says No, she means Perhaps; if she says Perhaps, she means Yes; if she says Yes, she is no Lady. If a diplomat says Yes, he means Perhaps; if he says Perhaps, he means No; if he says No, he is no Diplomat.

” ... Lord Bertrand Dawson “ No one means all he says, and yet very few say all they mean, for words are slippery and thought is viscous. ” ...

Henry Brooks Adams “ You know what charm is: a way of getting the answer yes without having asked any clear question. ” ... Albert Camus “ I say what I mean, you hear what I say. That is the end of it. .

.. Barbara Cassani [browse collection of quotes and quotations] Lessons in life: Do you view people who say Yes as cooperative and those who say No as rebellious? For some strange reasons, it is easier to say No to family members or close friends than to office colleagues or clients. At exit interviews, most of the feedback raised by employees relating to unhappiness at work had to do with their inability to refuse, reject, or disagree. Many staff and office workers feel the pressure and stress whenever they are approached by their bosses or senior colleagues for work favors. Deep in their hearts, they would have preferred to say No, either because they are already up to their necks with work, have prior commitments, or simply do not like the nature of the work favors. This heightens the resentment, dissatisfaction, and ultimately stress.

Work becomes a chore. Friendship turns into hatred. Depending on the individual personalities, not being assertive when required may lead to

undesirable consequences. First, not being able to express his unhappiness in office, the employee may direct his anger at innocent parties such as his family, neighbors, bystanders, or even pets. Secondly, the employee may 'explode' and unleash all he has against the office colleagues when he is no longer able to handle the pressure. Thirdly, the employee may turn vengeful against the company. This vindictive employee may resort to hate mails, sabotage, manipulation of accounts, whistle-blowing, or anything that can cause losses, humiliation or disgrace to the company or the bosses.

Fourthly, a quiet introvert may be so depressed as to contemplate suicide to end the misery. Whatever the consequences, the employee is likely to be job hopping and without stability in career, his financial rewards are likely to be compromised. While you may think that the employee has himself to blame, reasonable executives and managers should also review the work structure. In the new economy, multi-tasking is becoming a norm. People are valued based on their vast and diversified skill sets. Secretaries are stenographers, typists, personal assistants, and in some cases research assistants. Heads of departments are expected to handle public relations, organize corporate events, and undertake research projects that do not fall under the purview of their departments.

In most employment contracts, there is a “catch-all” clause which essentially stipulates that employees have to undertake any sort of work that the company requires them to perform. By defining the roles as vaguely as possible, it is inevitable that workers feel it is their responsibility to say Yes to anything that they are asked to do. The problem with doing the extra work is

that often you do not receive additional benefits or due recognition for your efforts. If the work is good, the persons who approach you for the favors get all the credits. If the work is bad, you will be dragged into the mud and be blamed for all the poor or slipshod work. Agreeing to take on every request merely eats up your time to serve their agendas at the expense of your own. If you find it hard to object or refuse, bear in mind some of these tips and techniques of saying No: 1.

Be firm and tactful Couch your answer with tact. Do not start with a No, but try to build up to that. You do not have to be disagreeable in order to disagree. Give a straightforward and direct explanation, and none of the misleading excuses that can lead the asker to question your decision. Be firm but polite. Politeness begets politeness. It doesn't sour relationships as much as an aggressive and contemptuous No.

Humor helps too. Do not apologize, as it shows your weakness and exposes your feelings of guilt. If the asker persists and pressurizes you, stick to your firm stance. Avoid further explanations and never trade insults should the asker turn abusive. Salesmen, for example, are trained to manipulate your mind and question your responses until you run out of answers. Don't allow them to do that. Be in control.

Just stick to your tactful answer, and they will leave you once they have heard enough of it. . Use non-verbal communication According to Kramer, "94% of our communication is nonverbal" (Seinfeld, 1998). If you find it difficult to utter a No, use your body language to convey the message. When you are asked, give a look that clearly says you are not interested. If it is a

serious topic, smile to give mixed signals. If both the asker and you are sitting down, do not lean forward to make it seem as if you are listening intently.

Instead, lean back, cross your legs and fold your arms. Be still, don't nod in agreement. Although fidgeting is a good indication that you are restless, too much of that may make you appear rude. Don't ask questions about the task, since that will let him think you have agreed to do it. 3. Buy time If you are held to ransom by a robber, terrorist, or kidnapper, it would be folly to say an outright No to their demands. The trick of dealing with people like them is to appear to say Yes, buy time, and avoid giving them what they want.

In the same manner, when dealing with difficult bosses, either delay saying Yes or play for time. Have the matter channeled through several other departments to obtain their response. Like a ping-pong ball, the consultation process will take several days or weeks. By then, the boss may have had an alternative solution to his problem, or may no longer need you to work on it. 4. Form a committee In a typical government bureaucracy, matters that do not have an obvious solution are buried in committees and task force. Meetings are time-consuming and mostly unproductive.

Furthermore, when there are several persons working on a matter, there are usually dissenting voices among them. If you do not agree on a certain proposition, suggest that a committee be formed, and let them be the ones saying No to your boss. 5. Seek clearance Ask if the person has sought clearance from his superiors. In any matter of importance, there is ought to

be a degree of confidentiality. Suggest that it may not be the CEO's or Chairman's idea to have such a matter undertaken by you. Bring in possible areas of conflict of interest, company's hierarchy and reporting structure, company procedures, and perhaps regulatory controls, if any.

Grab hold of anything to give the asker second thoughts about approaching you to handle the task. If you are in a team, let the asker know that you have to seek clearance from your team members too. The logic is simple. In undertaking additional work, you have less time for your own work, thereby forcing your team members to cover your duties. Keep your fingers crossed that your team members object to your additional work, and it would be them saying No to the asker. 6. Seek clarifications The idea is to ask so many questions that the person finds it easier to do the work himself.

Craft your questions as innocently as what a reasonable person would have asked. Even if you know the answers, do not assume that you are correct. Afterall, you are now doing this person a favor, and would not want to mess things up. If you keep on asking questions in the light of wanting to help him do a good job, he may not be unhappy with your questions, but will find it less of a hassle if he were to do the work himself. 7. Ask for a return favor There is nothing wrong asking for a reciprocal favor. If your colleague from the marketing department asks you to help out in a road show they are doing, respond with a Yes, and follow up immediately with a request that he keeps you company in office over the weekend while you clear your backlog.

Not only will it give him an idea as to how busy you are, it will make him rethink as to whether he truly needs your help. 8. Show hands Reveal your

busy work commitments. If you are already tied up with an important project, let it be known that while you have no objections handling a new one, you would be splitting your time between the two projects. As any wise person could conclude, the possible outcome is that both projects may not be done well. Let the management decide which project you should place priority into. Often than not, this is not an easy decision, and chances are that you will not be saddled with the new project.

9. Strike first During meetings, it is often the meek who are bullied and 'volunteered' by the powers that be to undertake additional initiatives. If you see it coming, be the first to show support but express regret at not being able to handle it due to your tight work schedule. Use this technique sparingly though. A shrewd manager may subsequently tie the initiative to a huge reward, and you would have lost a golden opportunity. 10.

Communicate personally Some people think that it is easier to say No through email and short messaging system.

However, out of respect for the asker, it is always better to say No in person, face-to-face. It may not be a pleasant encounter, but which would you prefer to be known by - a bold and assertive person, or a timid soul who hides behind the veil of a machine. Your reputation sticks with you throughout your career.