

The Power of No

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Today, we are looking at how a simple, two-letter word can have a huge impact on your life if used correctly.

It's nice to say yes. Studies have proven that making people happy by saying yes releases the [‘Happiness Trifecta’](#) of oxytocin, serotonin and dopamine. So, it makes sense that you'd want the warm feeling you get from giving or receiving a positive response.

It's human to like a yes.

However, ‘yes’ can be very dangerous. Once the fleeting warm feeling has gone, you can find yourself in a stressful situation.

‘Yes’ can get you involved with projects that take up time you don't have. ‘Yes’ can pull you away from your real purpose and goals. It can ruin downtime, recharge time, or family time. ‘Yes’ is dangerous.

On the other hand, ‘no’ is your friend and ally against the constant demands on your time. Yet, it's far more difficult for most of us to say ‘no’. By saying ‘no,’ we're pushing against altruism, the desire to prioritise the well-being of other people.

Let's start with an example of giving a difficult ‘no.’

Imagine you're good with numbers and spreadsheets. Your colleagues know this and regularly come to you with their Excel issues or accounting questions. While it feels great to help and teach them these skills, are you performing a task that an online course or IT helpdesk could be doing? Are your staff learning to solve these types of problems themselves, or are they just leaning on you?

You need to be helping them solve problems without your assistance. It may take longer at first, but you'll reap the rewards in the future. This is one way to scale yourself, and it starts with saying ‘no.’

Of course, sometimes, you need to say 'yes.' You can't say 'no' every time someone asks you to get involved.

Here are our top three rules on how to make that call.

Number 1 - Know Your Boundaries

Does it help me achieve my goals? Is it a must-do or a nice-to-do?

Prioritise properly. Know where your hard line is.

Not all projects or tasks that you do have to directly contribute to your bottom line. Some things are good for the soul. Sometimes, a coffee with someone may not seem a productive use of your time. But if it's deepening an important relationship or giving that person the confidence they need to succeed, then it's worth it. You make judgment calls like this every day. Start to recognise which falls within and which falls outside your boundaries.

Number 2 - Take Your Time

You don't need to reply to emails and messages as they come in. In fact, doing so can hurt your productivity. It disturbs your flow, and more often than not, you give an automatic response over a thought-through answer.

How often have you replied quickly, agreeing to something, and then regretted it later? The best way to avoid this is to take your time responding.

Flag that email or respond tentatively to that meeting invite where your presence is optional. Come back to the request with a clear head and make a decision.

Number 3 - Listen to Your Gut

Gut feeling is a powerful ally when saying 'no.'

If something seems like it may be a waste of time, then it most probably will be. Our top hack is to back up that gut feeling with some data points. Is your initial feeling accurate or is it holding you back from taking a big opportunity? Find the evidence and do the research to find out.

OK, so we know when to say 'no.' But it's still not necessarily an easy thing to communicate. So what's the best way? Our three favourite approaches:

Number 1 - Cushion It

Don't burn all your bridges in your new quest to say 'no.' People don't like hearing 'no,' even if it's for the best. So try to be polite about it and cushion those no's with an explanation.

For example:

"This sounds very interesting, but it's just not something that helps us achieve our current goals. Thanks for thinking of us, though, and please continue to bring new ideas our way."

"Thanks for considering me for this job. It looks exciting, but my plate is full right now".

Number 2 - Use "I Don't"

"I don't" helps others understand your boundaries and respect your time.

For example:

"Dave, can you get me the most up-to-date figures on the RP Briggs account?"

*"I **don't** run one-off figures as it's too time-consuming. However, I've attached last month's figures for all the accounts, and I'll be running this month's in 8 days. I'll be sure to send those to you."*

Number 3 - Suggest Alternatives

Sometimes, 'no' isn't a 'no' forever. It could just be a "not right now."

"I can't give that the focus it needs right now. However, it is something that interests me. Can we arrange a call in a couple of months instead?"

Or suggest an alternative method to achieving the same outcome.

"I don't think another meeting on that is a good use of our time. Can we collect our thoughts on this over email, and if we need to discuss further, arrange a meeting?"

Or suggest a different person.

"It will take me a while to extract all the information you need for this. Try Mary instead, as she is much closer to the detail".

So, let's summarise what we've discussed today. When making decisions on what you take on:

1. Know your boundaries and stick to them.

2. Take your time. You are allowed to think things over.
3. Listen to your gut.

Then, when saying no to things:

1. Cushion it, and don't be rude.
2. Use "I don't" to reinforce your boundaries.
3. Suggest alternatives.

If you take one thing from this lesson, it should be to live and work on your terms - not other people's. You're not impolite by saying 'no.' Saying '**no**' gives you the bandwidth to say '**yes**' at the right time.

Your aim for this week is to start thinking about some of your boundaries. Write them down and refer back to them when next faced with a yes/no problem.

Reading List

(Article) The Science of Kindness. Cedars Sinai

(Book) The Art Of Saying NO: How To Stand Your Ground, Reclaim Your Time And Energy, And Refuse To Be Taken For Granted (Without Feeling Guilty!). Damon Zahariades

(Article) How to Say No: A Guide to Saying No Politely. Grammarly

(Article) No One Will Protect Your Time For You. Deb Knobelmann, PhD

(Article) "I Don't" versus "I Can't": When Empowered Refusal Motivates Goal-Directed Behavior. Vanessa M. Patrick, Henrik Hagtvedt