

effective environments newsletter



CONSULTANTS TO NONPROFITS, SMALL BUSINESSES & ENTREPRENEURS

Saying NO

INTRODUCTION

One of the most under-used tools we have for being effective is our ability to say “no.” The inability to say “no” is one of the single biggest wasters of time. Yet, most of us often find it difficult to do — even when we know that “no” is the response that really works for us. This article examines why saying “no” is so tough and how to incorporate it into our effectiveness repertoire.

WHY IT MATTERS

It’s important to say “no.” Being able and willing to decline requests and invitations is a key tool in managing overwhelm and that sense of being too busy. The more effective you are, the more requests will be made of you. This escalates geometrically. Remember, you are a finite resource and it is critical that you use yourself strategically. When you spread yourself too thin, your own commitments suffer. When you become resentful of requests, you are no longer open to receive them. All of us need “down time” and “alone time” to regenerate — and it rarely works to give yourself only what is left over when

everyone else’s requests have all been fulfilled.

CONSEQUENCES OF NOT SAYING NO

There are consequence to a failure to say “no” when it’s appropriate to do so. One important consequence is that you take on more than you can possibly do, leading to a feeling of overwhelm. You may also end up feeling “put upon” and become angry or resentful. Ultimately, the outcome may be that you become ill or stressed.

WHY WE DON’T SAY NO

There are any number of reasons why we find it hard to say no. Without attempting to be exhaustive, consider the following and see if you recognize yourself in them.

It can be difficult to decline a request if our own sense of self-worth depends on being perceived as “super person” or if we fear we will lose the regard of the person making the request.

There are situations where we feel sure that saying “no” will offend the other person. We

may even fear that saying “no” could damage our relationship with the requestor. Saying “no” seems like saying “our relationship or friendship is over.”

Sometimes we know that we are asked to do something because we would make a real contribution and we can’t bear to refuse something so worthwhile.

In some cases, we may say “yes” because we don’t feel we have a choice in the matter. The boss says “I need this today.” Or, your wife informs you that her mother is coming to visit for two weeks. You get the idea.

Take a look at yourself and see what stops you from saying “no” when you know it’s the thing to do.

WHEN TO SAY NO

There are no hard and fast rules for when to say “no.” As time and circumstances change, so will your choices about when to say “no.” Consider asking yourself these questions when a request is made of you:

- Am I willing to do this?



- Is it something that I have the knowledge and skills to do?
- Given all my current commitments and projects, do I have time to do this?
- Is this request something that fits with my commitments and intentions for my life?

Then CHOOSE “yes” or “no.”

Some other reasons to say “no” include the following:

- You have a conflicting engagement. (This is the easy one.)
- You have one or more commitments (in your schedule or on your lines) that are too close to the invitation. It will be too much of a squeeze to fit both in, and both will suffer. This applies not only to scheduling issues but also to issues of personal well-being. Even if you can fit something in, you may be so tired as a result that other things suffer.
- The opportunity, though rich, is not on your personal purpose line. (You do not see that your commitments are forwarded by saying “yes.”)
- The nature of the request is not in the scope of your accountabilities. You may know how to do it, might enjoy doing it, and think it’s a needed piece of work. However, you are not accountable for it. (This is especially applicable at work and even in some volunteer activities.)
- Other people could fulfill the need/meet the opportunity as well as you (and it may even be a chance to help THEM grow).
- The opportunity does not gladden your heart. For whatever the reason, it feels like a burden rather than a delicious opportunity.

HOW TO SAY NO

Here are some pointers on saying “no” gracefully:

- Remember that “no” means nothing about the relationship.
- Begin by affirming the relationship and thanking the person — genuinely and profoundly — for the invitation.
- Say no, clearly. (“I’m sorry, I’m not available.” “I’m afraid I have a prior commitment.” “That won’t work for me right now.”)
- Offer alternatives, when appropriate. E.g., “I’m not able to join your committee, but would be glad to serve as a resource, attend the first meeting, look over your business plan and offer comments, etc.” or “I’m not available; however, I can give you the names of some people who would be real assets on that team.”
- Acknowledge the inviter (for thinking of you, for what they are doing). Wish them success and good fortune.

CONCLUSION

When you can say “no,” you are also able to say “yes” authentically, because you have the ability to choose. When people can trust you to say yes or no truthfully, and to both (a) do what you say you will do and (b) take care of yourself, they are free to

make requests without fear or worry.

Saying “no” does not mean being “negative” or losing your reputation as a team player. There are times when a friendly “no” may be an appropriate response. “No” does not need to signify a break in relationship. It doesn’t mean, “never ask me again.” It is just “no.” A handy word in any vocabulary.

POSTSCRIPT

Saying “no,” by itself, is not a useful response when the request falls squarely within your accountabilities. In these cases, your next move is to find ways to say “yes” that will have everything work. More on this later.

To Our Readers:

We have published our two-sided quarterly **effective environments** newsletter for 12 years. This format has been just right up until now: Two sided newsletters are more likely to be read by busy people and they have been useful for staying in touch with all our clients. Now, however, it is time for a change.

We will be turning our attention to publishing longer articles, on an intermittent basis, which explore human-centered development and foster the effectiveness of individuals, teams and agencies through practical and immediately applicable information and ideas.

We remain committed to sharing our technologies and

perspectives and to contributing to the creation of environments in which people and organizations thrive.

effective environments' articles will be posted on our web site and we will gladly send electronic announcements of these postings to those of you who give us your e-mail address.

To all of you who have so faithfully followed our quarterly missives over the years, THANK YOU.

May all your environments be effective ones!

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