The Challenge of Saying No

It isn't always easy to say no, but for some people it's particularly challenging.
If you find it difficult, you may want to ask yourself….**why is it so hard for me to say no?**

If you are thinking…

I don't want to be labeled as uncooperative or not a team player.	I don't think my boss will support me if I say no.	I don't feel comfortable confronting people. Saying "no" isn't really polite.	All these requests seem like top priorities, so I don't know when to say "no."	Sometimes it is easier to say "yes" and then wait… often it just goes away.	I've gotten in trouble in the past for saying no, so I'd rather not take the chance.	My job is to provide people with support, so I shouldn't say no. Besides, the "customer" is always right.	They won't like me if I say "no" to their request

You might want to consider…

What can you do to demonstrate you are cooperative and a **team player on a regular basis** so you have enough credit built up to say "no" when it's necessary? How can you say "no" in such a way that it doesn't appear that you are being uncooperative?	Are you sure that's true? Perhaps he didn't support you in the past. Does that mean he never will? **Consider having a discussion with him about saying no.** Ask him his opinion. Who can/can't you say no to? About what? What should you do if you're not sure? When should you seek his opinion?	If you find it difficult to say no directly, think about **alternative approaches**. Try asking questions that stimulate a conversation and get the concerns out in the open. Consider asking **why, what's best, and what-if type questions.** Try the "recommended no" -- explained below.	Who can help you **clarify the relative priority of requests**? Your boss or customers? It can help to review their requests togethrer and ask, which is most important. If "X" wasn't done on time, what would happen? How about "Y"? The answers **can reveal where to say "no"** in the future.	Using "yes" as a stalling tactic, demonstrates a type of **"passive-aggressive" behavior.** You are appearing cooperative but in reality you don't agree with the request. While sometimes this "works," consider the impression you make. Is that **the impression you are seeking to convey?**	**Why did you get in trouble in the past?** Did you say "no" to something that was **more important than you thought**? How can you assess the importance of this request? Did you get in trouble because of **the way you said no**? If so, what are some subtler or different ways to say no?	What if they ask for something that you don't think will help them? Is that in their best interest? **If you regularly say yes to things you shouldn't you may not be available to help when something important arises.** Is that the type of support you want to provide?	They may not like it when you say "no," but **they won't respect you if you always say yes** and never challenge them; if you **say yes and don't deliver** because you said yes to an unrealistic request; or if you are **unavailable to address important needs** because of saying yes to something unnecessary.

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8 Ways to Say No

It helps to have several different ways to say no, including some that are more subtle and some that are partly a "yes." **Build your repertoire of ways to say no** effectively.

Direct No
> No, I won't do that.

This type of no should be used when other types of "no" have not or will not work, and the situation is such that you feel you cannot or should not do what is requested. If you must use a direct no, **say it calmly and respectfully** so it does not appear to be a personal rejection.

A direct statement that clearly indicates that you will not do what has been requested

Partial No
> We can certainly complete part A, but we won't be able to do part B.

This approach is useful when you agree with and can complete part of the person's request, but either cannot or should not complete another part of the request. The partial no **shows that you are trying to help,** but also clarifies those parts of the request that you do not think you will fulfill.

Agreeing to part of the request, but saying no to another part

Recommended No
> I would strongly advise you not to take that approach since it is not likely to accomplish X.

If you have relevant expertise, this is one of the **most effective ways of saying no.** Often the recommended no is followed by a rationale ("here's why") or the presentation of an alternative ("so instead I suggest"). A key to using this form of no is **explaining why** the requested action will not accomplish what they want it to accomplish.

Strongly advising the person, based on your experience or expertise, that the action he has requested is not prudent

Not Me No
> I'm not the right person to do this, but Jim should be able to help you.

Use the not me no **when you are the wrong person to complete a request and you know who can help**. This may be because you lack the time or expertise to complete the request, or because the request is outside your role. With the not me no you refer the requestor to someone who can better address their need.

Referring the person to someone else who is a better choice for handling the request

Not Now No
> We can't do that now but could in the third quarter, is that acceptable?"

This is appropriate when you are **willing to do what is requested but won't have time** to do so until later. This gives the person the choice to wait for you or to seek an alternative solution. If they cannot wait until you are available, you may be able to help them brainstorm alternatives (e.g., finding someone else to help, taking a different approach).

Letting the person know that you cannot fulfill her request at this point (or within the requested time frame) but could complete it later

Replacement No
> Rather than doing X, we can do Y, which should be equally (or more) effective.

This is applicable when you **understand the need and want to help, but do not believe the requested action is the right one**. Identifying an alternative solution, allows you to say no to the request and still show an interest in helping to resolve the issue. Be sure to convey your understanding of the situation and explain how your replacement solution will address the person's real need.

Offering a substitute or replacement solution instead of taking the action that was requested

Not Next Time No
(Last time and teach)
> I'll help you with it this time. But you need to be able do this yourself, let's make sure you know how to do it without me.

This no is often applicable when your role has changed and you're asked to do something that is no longer part of your role. **Be clear about what will happen next time** and use this as an **opportunity for the person to build self-sufficiency.** They may still request help in the future, but you may find it easier to say no at that point.

Saying yes to the current request, letting him know that this is the last time you'll do this, and teaching him how to do it without you

Conditional No
(Yes, if…)
> We can do that, if you'll be able to provide XYZ.

This is appropriate when you are concerned that **you will not be able to deliver what is requested, unless the requestor helps out** in some way (e.g., providing people, support, resources, etc.) If she says yes to your request, you will be receiving what you need to deliver successfully. Alternatively, if she determines she is unable or unwilling to provide what you requested, she is basically saying no rather than you.

Letting the person know what is needed for you to say yes