



## The Power and Freedom of Saying No

"No" can sometimes seem a very difficult thing to say. Have you ever noticed, however, that kids say "No" all the time? My 8-year-old, for example, is really really good at it. I think "No" was one of the first words out of her mouth. So how do we lose the ability to say "No?"

Well, we don't lose it, exactly. We give it up for something we think is more important. For one, it can be a desire to please that keeps us from saying "No." Many of us grow up to be people pleasers, and we substitute lots of ways to be agreeable and keep other people happy instead of simply saying "No."

Yet saying "No" can sometimes be even more supportive of our relationships than saying "Yes." How many of us have said "Yes" to someone and then not followed through on what we agreed to do? The very people we set out to please may feel let down and disappointed. We may also disappoint ourselves because we feel guilty when we don't complete something we said we would do.

Wanting to appear competent is another reason people don't say "No." Sometimes we take on a

If someone continues to ask, use the broken record technique:

- "I understand you'd like me to do this, but as I said, I am focused on completing XYZ..."
- "I heard your request, but as I said, I am not available."

If someone persists after a few attempts at the broken record technique, be aware that a couple of things may be going on. It could be a case of controlling and manipulative behavior – in which case your strong "No" position is the perfect response. You'll earn respect from others, and from yourself, when you stay true to a position of integrity. Conversely, the person may appreciate some assistance in finding the help they need. In this case, ask them to state the problem they're trying to solve. Oftentimes the help they've asked for is not the only solution and you may be able to help them find an alternative they hadn't considered.

### Sometimes the real answer is "not now"

Understand what you are being asked to do. You may be able to offer an alternative solution.

request to do something just because we can, or we think we should. We give up our own work-life balance to help others. Ultimately this impacts those we serve because we are out of balance in our own lives.

The ability to say "No" with power and freedom comes from knowing what your objectives are, knowing what is most important to you, and knowing to what you can and cannot commit. With these things clarified you can be completely honest and straightforward with your response.

### How to say No with power and freedom

First, you need to know what your objectives are. Then you can remind the requester (even a demanding boss) what you are working on, and what has been identified as a top priority. This gives you some leverage to say:

- "This does not relate to one of my existing objectives; is this more important for me to complete?"
- "Is this request more or less important than objective X that I am working on now?"
- "Which of my current objectives would you like me to let go of so I can include this new one?"

Next, you need to know how much time you need to complete your objectives. This gives you a lot of power to say "No" with integrity:

Remember it is easier to say "No" now, with an offer of help later:

- "I can't do that this week, but I will be able to give you some time next week."
- "Let me get back with you on Friday after I finish this."
- "I am focused on completing ... so I'm not available for ... Perhaps I could do ....for you instead."

### Ask for time to consider

If you are a chronic people pleaser, train yourself to ask for time to think the request over. Learn to pause before agreeing to anything. This will give you time to check in with yourself and make an informed choice instead of agreeing just to be agreeable.

- "Let me check my calendar and get back to you on Wednesday."
- "Let me think about this before making a commitment to you and I will e-mail you back in 48 hours."
- "I need to confirm my availability before I commit. I will call you tomorrow."

The best way to say "No" is to say it with confidence and freedom. To do that you must know what your objectives are. We all have a limited amount of time, attention and energy; so every time we say "Yes"

- "I can't help you with that, I am focused on completing objectives A, B and C right now ..."
- "I am not available until I finish objective XYZ at the end of this month."

One client we recently worked with (we'll call him Bruce) dreaded weekly staff meetings, because he would walk out of them with an average 20 new tasks to complete, and he already felt overwhelmed.

During the staff meeting his manager would look at him and say something like, "Bruce, do you think you could get this done by Friday?" and Bruce would reply, "Sure."

Bruce said he would walk out of the meetings feeling badly because he had no idea how he was going to get these new requests completed on time. He didn't like letting people down and missing deadlines.

After attending an MPS seminar he began responding to requests in meetings by saying, "Sure. I can do that by Friday. It will mean that I will have to delay this other objective; is that okay with you?" He and his manager would then discuss the options and they would reach an agreement.

After a few meetings Bruce's manager told him that he liked this new approach and asked him why he was now responding to his requests this way. Bruce told his boss about the MPS session he attended and what he had learned. The manager

to one thing, we are by default saying "No" to something else. So, the next time you are too quickly tempted to answer "Yes" to a new request, just remember if an 8-year-old can say "No" easily, we can too. It just takes some preparation and a desire to take care of yourself, honor your commitments, and take control of your work-life balance.

- Anne McGhee Stinson, MPS  
Executive Consultant

Note: For more information on saying "No," see Chapter 5 of [Take Back Your Life! Using Microsoft Outlook to Get Organized and Stay Organized](#), by Sally McGhee.

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### E-News Quote:

"I really cannot give you the formula for success. But I can give you the formula for failure. It's this: Try to please everyone."

- Bernard Meltzer

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### MPS in the News

The Microsoft Momentum newsletter has an interview with Sally McGhee about ["Managing the Always-On Lifestyle."](#) Writer Howard Baldwin presents Sally McGhee's five tips for ensuring that work doesn't elbow its way into your personal life.

Sally McGhee is also featured in this

replied:

“Bruce, I truly meant those requests in the meetings to be questions.” Bruce responded “Yeah, but I never heard them as requests; I heard them as demands so I always said yes even if I knew I couldn’t get them done on time.”

Needless to say, Bruce and his team are now working together more productively.

### **Make it simple and direct**

A weak “No” is accompanied by excuses and rationalizations. If you lack confidence when you say “No” you may think that you need to support your “No” with lots of reasons to convince the other person that you mean it. Instead, try the direct approach:

- “No, I won’t be able to help you with that.”
- “No, I’m not available.”
- “No, I won’t commit to that.”

[Microsoft Connections audio interview](#) discussing barriers to productivity and how the small business owner can cope.

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### **On the Horizon...**

MPS is about to launch a series of new, low-cost learning products that will complement your training and help automate your Integrated Management System. We’re really excited about these new products and would like to tell you about them as soon as they are available. [Click here](#) if you’d like us to let you know just as soon as they are announced.

On June 8th at 9am PDT Sally McGhee and MPS Executive Consultant John Wittry will be featured presenters in the Microsoft Leadership Forum, a twice-weekly program in which best-selling authors and thought leaders conduct free, interactive business seminars about today’s hottest topics and trends. Sally and John will talk about “Getting to Zero in Your Inbox.” This seminar will also be available for about three months following the event. Register [here](#) for this important event.

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