

## Saying No

Saying 'NO' can be very difficult. There are various reasons for this, often we like to please others and can feel that the 'NO' would be an unwelcome response. Others individuals can be wary of the reaction that the 'NO' might provoke, the other person may become aggressive or emotional. When you look at the behaviour of children they are often very good at saying 'NO'. They don't have the inhibitions or behaviours that we learn as we grow up that can limit our communication as an adult.

If you believe 'NO' is the right response, its crucial that you say it as directly as possible. Don't feel that you have to give excuses or explanations! If you do have to give an explanation, give one succinct reason rather than half a dozen, otherwise you dilute your argument. You have the right to say 'NO' without guilt, especially if you have valid reasons to do so. Saying 'NO' without feeling guilty or anxious can be difficult and for many requires practice.

An individual who is assertive is not afraid to say 'NO' to either colleagues or customers. In many circumstances saying 'NO' may be the most positive outcome, rather than disappointing a colleague or customer later on.

When you say 'NO', it is important to do so assertively and with confidence. Some useful techniques include:

- Be direct – avoid longwinded excuses or apologies
- Give an explanation
- Provide an alternative

## Barriers to Saying No

If saying no is so important, why don't people do it? Why don't you? What holds people back? There are several reasons, some of them may be the ones that apply to you.

## Wanting them not to ask you

You shouldn't have to say no. If others were more considerate they wouldn't ask you to do so many unreasonable things! This belief may cause you to be resentful and angry. The reality, though, is that others have the right to ask you anything they want. You have to decide whether the request is reasonable or not. "Can I have your car?" is unreasonable, "can I borrow your car" maybe be a more reasonable request, depending on who is asking.

### **They won't accept your response**

You think that even if you did say no, the people in your life would assume you'd go along with them anyway. You might be right about this. If you have gone along with all of their requests for years, they may expect you to continue in that role. The first few times you say no, they won't really believe what they hear – unless you show you mean it.

### **They won't accept *me***

You believe that the only reason anyone accepts you is that you're willing to do all the dirty work. If you stopped doing it, they wouldn't like you or accept you. It is possible that some people only have you in their lives because you know that you will do things for them. You need to question the balance in the relationship and what you would like from them.

### **I don't have the *right* to say no**

It's selfish to take care of your own needs or to put yourself before the needs of others. The reality is, you do have the right to say no. You have needs like everyone else and you are entitled to take care of yourself. Remember that we're not talking about becoming the most selfish person on earth. We're talking about it being your decision what you will and will not do.

There's nothing wrong with saying yes, doing favours, or taking on responsibilities. Problems arise, though, if you do these things because you can't say no or don't know how to do so. Here we identify techniques those times when you wish to say no. Identify the skills you most need to practice.

- **Use assertive body posture.** Use direct eye contact, keep your head up, shoulders back, hands relaxed or gesturing normally, and voice calm and loud enough to be heard. If you communicate "no" with your words and maybe with your body, people will believe the message of your body and push harder.
- **Decide on your position before you speak.** If you're not sure what your answer is, don't answer yet. Decide exactly what you are and are not willing to do. If you're wishy-washy or uncertain, you invite others to push you into a "yes" response. If necessary, ask for some time to think about it.
- **Wait for the question.** Some people agree before they are even asked! If this is one of your stumbling blocks, then even a hint is enough to get you to volunteer your time. This is convenient for the other person because they don't owe you anything – after all, they didn't ask you for the favour, you volunteered. Volunteering is just fine

– when you *choose* to do it. But if you find yourself volunteering more than you would like and feeling weighed down by too many of the resulting obligations, force yourself to wait for the request. Requests tend to be fewer. This is one of those occasions in which the assertive thing to do is simply to keep your mouth shut.

- **Decide on your wording.** Think through not only *what* you want to say but also *how* you want to say it. Otherwise you are much more likely to stammer, wander about and invite a challenge. Be clear about your answer. Don't leave your questioner wondering what you really mean. If you mean to say no, don't say, "*I'm not sure if ...*" or "*Maybe later sometime ...*" Instead, word it clearly: "*No, I'm not willing to do that.*"
- **Decide on how you want to say it.** Identify not only *what* you want to say but also *how* you want to say it. Focus on your communication and don't stammer, waffle or invite a challenge. Be clear about your message don't leave any ambiguity. If you mean to say no, don't use passive language like, "*I'm not sure if ...*" or "*Maybe later sometime ...*" Instead, use positive language: "*No, I'm not willing to do that.*"
- **Don't say sorry.** Sorry puts gives the power to the other person. They suggest that the other person is entitled to ask for a favour. In some situations this may be the message you want to give, at other times it may be entirely inappropriate. If that is the case avoid phrases such as "*I'm sorry but I really can't ...*" or "*I really should but ...*"
- **Don't over defend yourself or make excuses.** It's not that you *can't* do it, it's that you *choose* not to do it. Giving excuses also invites the other person to help you find a way around the barrier: if you do need to give a reason give one rather than ten. If you use too many excuses you will dilute your argument.
- **Don't ask permission.** You have the right to say no and you don't have to ask permission. Asking permission tells the other person that they have the power and they are in charge. Don't use phrases such as: "*Would it be okay if I didn't ...*" or "*Will you be annoyed if I ...*"
- **Use Strength.** Don't expect that people will accept your refusal the first time you turn them down – especially if you've been saying yes for years. Be ready for them to push again and respond with a refusal that is strong and assertive. Ensure that you keep your message positive and don't react.

- **Use the broken record.** Don't rephrase your response every time you give it. If you do the other person will believe you are weakening. Using a response more than once doesn't wear it out. If you keep repeating the same message, eventually they'll hear it. *"No, I'm not willing to do that."* *"No, I'm not willing to do that."* *"No, I'm not willing to do that."* Don't worry if you think this will sound odd, it doesn't, it just ensures that you get your message across.
- **Don't look for acceptance.** You don't have to convince others to accept your refusal or agree with it. You are assuming that you have the right to say no only if you can convince others to see your point. If you keep justifying yourself every time they repeat the request, then you are saying that they have the ultimate power.
- **Accept the consequences.** You have the right to say no, but others have the right not to like it. When you say no, there might be unpleasant consequences in the way that others react. This needs to be recognised and accepted. If you know you are right to say ensure that you respond effectively to any reaction. Remain assertive, listen and respond, but ensure that you stand your ground. This could be the first time someone has said no to them!

