

How to Effectively Say No....

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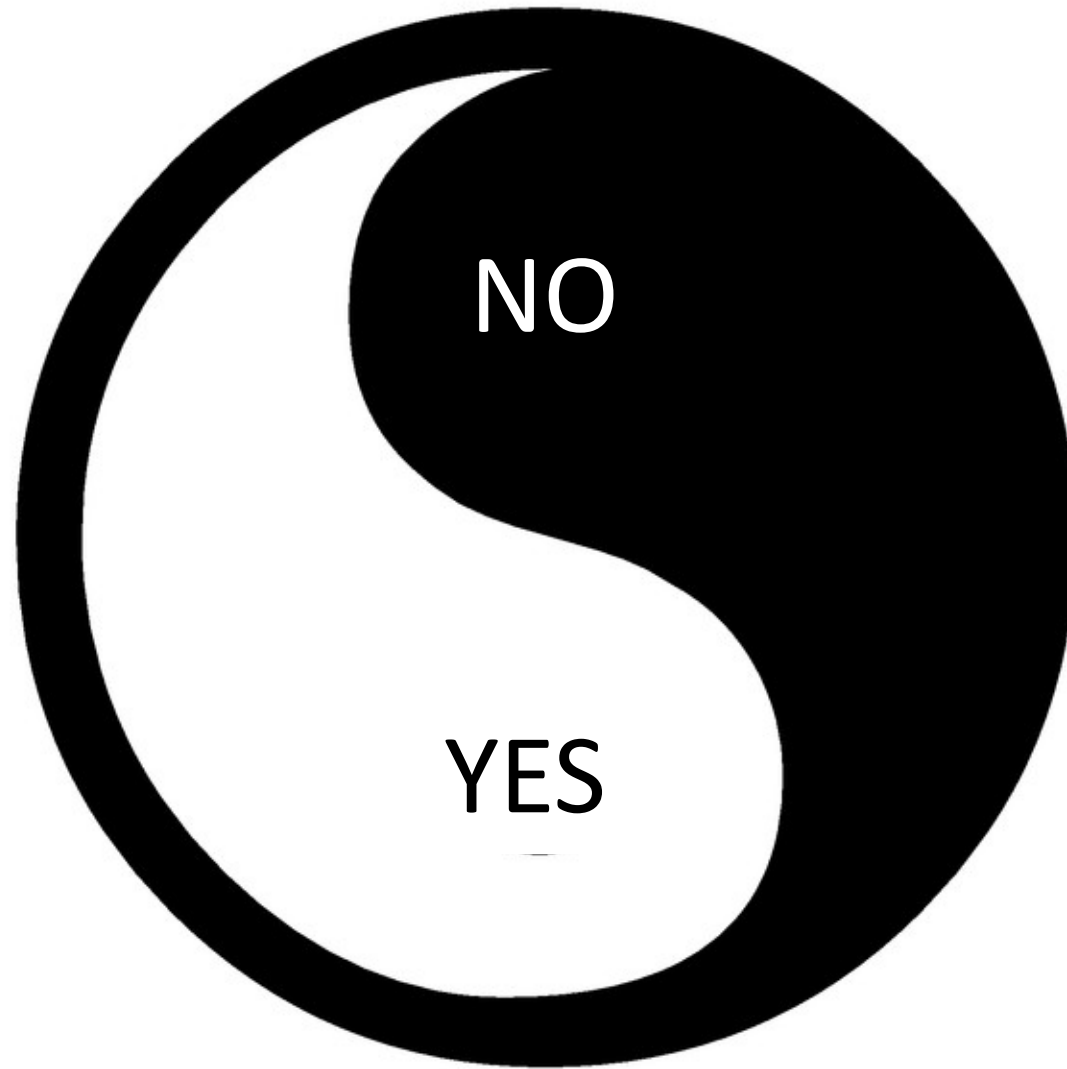
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How to Effectively Say No....

Deciding when to say NO
and when to say YES

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The punchline.....



Objectives

- Develop a **strategy** for deciding what projects and opportunities you should say “Yes” to and which should get a resounding “No” as you move forward in your career.



Know your path: What is your trajectory?

Basic Scientist

Clinical Researcher



Clinician Educator

Program Builder

Your Mission Statement

1. What would you most like to have/do in your career?
2. What activities in your professional life are most fulfilling?
3. If you had unlimited time/resources, what would you do?
4. What qualities and characteristics are most important to you?
5. What talents and skills do you have?
6. How can you best contribute to others?

Urgent

Not Urgent

Important

**Major
Competition**

**Mission
Centric**

Not
Important

Tedium

Worth Ignoring

Stephen Covey

Objectives

- Develop a strategy for deciding what projects and opportunities you should say “Yes” to and which should get a resounding “No” as you move forward in your career.
- Learn various methods for saying “No”, realizing that by saying “No” you are saying “Yes” to **your** personal priorities .
 -and existing obligations

Put first things first: APPLIED

- Learn to say “**NO**” to items that do not move you forward



What do successful people say “NO” to often?

- Opportunities/things that don't excite them, speak to their values, or further their mission
- Spending time with uninspiring, critical or negative people: develop a small circle that energizes you
- Long hours and neglect of self-care and family
- Doing all the work...delegate
- Keep control of their time

Warren Buffett's approach

- "The difference between successful people and really successful people is that really successful people say no to almost everything."

When you say **YES**.....

- It fits your path and your priorities
- You have time to do it
- And you can identify activities to STOP doing in order to be able to do it
 - Unless you want to work longer hours and weekends....



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Realize that when you say YES.....

- By saying YES, you are adding another demand on your time
 - This means you are essentially saying NO to something else...something you have already committed to
 - Unless, of course, you have lots of free time...
 - Or you are willing to add to your work hours for a short period of time



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Realize that when you say YES.....

- Opportunity cost: the future
 - Deciding on one choice removes the potential of a second choice (when they are mutually exclusive, which is most of the time in our time-crunched world)



Major Steps to Saying No...

1. Know your priorities and your path
 - a. How does this new opportunity fit?
2. Realize that when you say YES, you are saying NO to something else (and vice versa)
 - a. What are you going to STOP doing to make room?
3. Distance yourself from the request
 - a. Gives you room to you make the right decision
 - b. Helps you craft a strategy for saying No

Distance yourself

- Take the time you need to make the best decision
 - Let me think about it and get back to you...
 - Let me look at my schedule and other commitments and get back to you....
 - Let me talk to my mentor and get back to you....



Distance yourself

- Distance
 - Say NO by email, voice message



Case #1

- You have been asked to organize a course by your Chair. It requires coordinating with 5 other faculty, all of whom you have a long history of working with. You have talked among this group about organizing a course and everyone is enthusiastic. You and your colleagues have been teaching medical students for years and have always received exemplary evaluations, so this is a great opportunity to really show what your group is capable of. Your career has been a bit of a hybrid, so you have done some clinical research and organized some training experiences, including the medical student rotation through your service with your colleagues. While you generally like the idea of organizing the course, you do not have time given your current responsibilities and something will have to go if you say YES.

Major Steps to Saying No...

1. Know your priorities and your path
2. Realize that when you say YES, you are saying NO to something else (and vice versa)
3. Distance yourself from the request
 - a. Helps you make the right decision
 - b. Helps you craft a strategy for saying No
4. Preface NO with positive comments about the project/request/opportunity

Preface No with positive comments

- “That is such a great opportunity....”
- “What a fantastic idea...”
- “I would really love to participate...”
 - I am already committed to XYZ and cannot get out of these
 - I am already over-booked and will only disappoint you
 - I cannot free up my time to meet the deadline for this one

Case #2

- You have received an email inviting you to become a member of the Education and Training Committee for your professional society. While this is not exactly something you are highly involved in, you see this as an opportunity to get involved with your society which can be hard to break into. You know that these invitations are generally rare, so you think this might be something you need to seriously consider as a professional activity that will be a good investment in your future. You decide to call your colleague who nominated you to talk about the opportunity and where it might go for you in terms of building your national reputation and collaborations with colleagues at different institutions. The conversation you want to have has the primary goal of fact finding to help you decide whether to say YES or NO to this nomination.
 - What would you want to know from this person about the committee and how this committee's work fits the overall work of the society?
 - Your Goal: decide if this is a good investment for you at this point in your career.

You Are So Kind to Think of Me

[My last post](#) focused on when to say “no” to people or activities that aren’t aligned with your most important priorities. Deciding to decline a request is the easy part. Delivering the news in a way that doesn’t damage the way people think of you is a bit tougher. Because I struggle with disappointing others, I pay special attention to the artful ways the “thanks, but no thanks” message can be delivered. I received a particularly good template for future use last week.

At a colleague’s suggestion, I sent an e-mail invitation to a rock-star faculty member I don’t know very well. I wanted her to serve on an advisory committee and promised that we would be efficient, so the commitment would not be terribly burdensome. Two weeks went by without a word, so I assumed she had communicated her answer by not answering. And then something surprising happened. I got a response!

Allison,

I’ve been trying to figure out a way to say that I could do this—because I would enjoy it. But the terrible truth is that I am really overcommitted in the next couple of years, and adding anything is probably not a good idea.

I really hope I can help in the future.

- I'm not the best person for that, so let me suggest (insert two names).
- It would be so great to work with you on this, so I'm crushed that my schedule won't permit me to do this.
- I wish I could say "yes," but I'm in the middle of a big project right now.
- This is an important event, and I'm afraid I wouldn't be able to give this the attention it deserves.
- Can you give me a few weeks to think about this and call you if I think I can make this work?
- I wouldn't be able to participate on a regular basis, but I'd be happy to serve as a sounding board from time to time.
- You are so kind to think of me. I wish I could.

Focus on the obstacles

- “If we do X, what would be the impact on Y?”
 - discuss how this fits with your other projects/priorities, esp if the person requesting your work is your mentor
 - Is there an alternative project with this person that is more consistent with your career goals (e.g., different topic for the book chapter?)
- Focus on points of agreement (rather than points of disagreement)

Case #3

- You have been offered a chapter by your Division Chief that does NOT fit with your career plan. It is on a topic for which you have limited expertise, but the book is not going to be an important book and it will be a lot of work for you. In order to write the chapter, you will have to update your knowledge of the literature, and the angle they want is not one you have written about before. You are already having trouble finding time to write an important paper that will position you well nationally in your area. This paper has been harder to write than you thought it would be and you have had to go back and re-analyze one aspect of the project. You really don't have time to delve into this new area right now and feel that it will derail you from this important paper. This paper will position you for the next stage in the project, so it is very important to you that it get out in the next few months. You suspect a colleague at another university may have a similar paper in the works and you want to make sure yours is first in press.

Other suggestions

- Practice saying no for small things and/or in “safe” situations
- Stand up for yourself – protect your interests; don’t assume others will
- Trust your instincts – shut out the naysayers and negative noise
- Always project confidence – present yourself as in control and happy
 - Lean forward
 - Make usual eye contact
 - Practice in front of a mirror

Recommended Readings

- *Essentialism* by Greg McKeown
- *Getting Things Done* by David Allen