

How to Say No with Grace

Becky Smith, WVU Extension Agent – Harrison County
Lauren Prinzo, WVU Extension Agent – Marion County

Educational Objectives

1. Learn effective strategies when you need to say no to requests, both personal and professional.
2. Understand the challenge and conflicts of saying no.
3. Learn to be positive and kind in the “no” response while negotiating the win-win result.

Saying no can be one of the most difficult responses that we have to give in the process of daily life. But that two-letter word holds balance, priorities, values and goals within it. Let’s discuss some of the ins and outs of saying no with grace.

Why is it Important to Say No?

When you are caught up in a swirl of commitments, it can take a toll on your health and well-being. The added stress could cause exhaustion, sickness and leave you feeling depleted or like a failure. The trap of saying yes when we need to say no can also lead to more demands and expectations from others. This can snowball into sacrificing our own priorities. Asking the question, “What are the most important things that I need or want to do?” can help establish healthy boundaries.

When you are setting your priorities, remember the most important one - YOU! You cannot help anyone if you do not take care of yourself first. Set aside time for yourself for

exercise, making healthy meals and activities you enjoy. When faced with overwhelming tasks, this is the priority that often gets left behind. Guard time for yourself as firmly as any other priority on your list.

Because we have limited time, resources and goals, we need to spend them all wisely and with consideration. Most of us will take the time after New Years to think about our resolutions for the upcoming year. This would be a perfect opportunity to take time to reflect on your goals and what is important to you before you commit to new tasks in the upcoming year.



– continued –

Saying No is Hard

Saying no can be difficult, especially if we depend on the other person for certain needs. Considering our needs and values, along with what is being requested, can be a delicate balancing act.

There are many reasons that it can be difficult to say no. The most common reasons include a fear of the four Rs.

- **Relationship** – Will I damage a relationship or come across as uncaring?
- **Retaliation** – What if the consequences of saying no are costly?
- **Regret** – Will I feel guilty if I say no?
- **Reaction** – What if I lose my sense of belonging or my position? (Possible alternate: What if someone gets offended or upset and has a volatile response?)

If we are motivated by pleasing others without thought of our own needs and wants, we may end up with an unhealthy result. Before the requests even come our way, we need to know what values and interest are most important in our lives. Prioritizing can help us weed out the time busters that keep us from meeting the goals we have set for ourselves.

Club Activity: Practice saying no by using the following scenario: You are volunteering for two organizations and babysitting your grandchildren one day per week. You have been asked to take the lead on organizing a fundraiser for a worthy cause. You do not have the time to fulfill your current obligations, take care of yourself and take on this new project. What do you do?

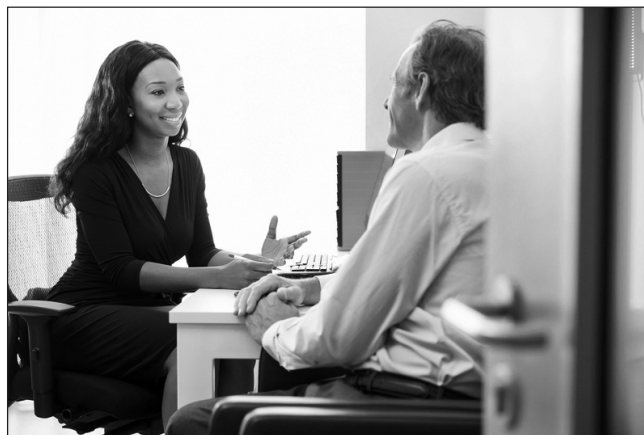


Graceful Ways to Say No and Be Kind

When considering a request, you must first assess your goals. Answering the following questions can help guide you to the best decision for you. If needed, find a trustworthy mentor who can help advise you about your concerns.

- Do you have the time to complete the task?
- Is it important to you?
- Does it line up with your own goals?
- What is the driving force that motivates you to answer the call or request?

Sometimes we have a deeper motive in our hesitation to say no. Is it that you feel the need to prove yourself to others or to be a pleaser? Take the opportunity to reflect before you say yes or no.



When considering requests, remember these goals:

- Be grounded in your values.
- Be wise by weighing and balancing your goals and interests.
- Be focused with specific goals and stick with the plan.
- Be strategic when you choose to say yes.

We should always conduct ourselves with grace and kindness. The opposite of a win-win approach would be to respond in a rude, harsh or self-centered way. The Golden Rule is one that we can always keep in the forefront of how we react to requests. In order to maintain relationships, it is important to remember to be positive and respectful when addressing requests. It can be difficult for people seeking help when others turn them down. While it is important to say no to safeguard your time, it is



equally important to make sure the person making the request does not feel dismissed or rejected. Remember to start with a positive comment, affirm the importance of their project/task and express your regret. Here are some simple ways to respond:

- Thank you for thinking of me, but I cannot do that right now.
- I am honored that you think I am the person for the job, but I cannot do it justice at this time.
- I am able to do this part, but I am not able to do that.
- That is such a good cause, but right now I have committed to this other project or task.
- I am not able to do that right now, but I would love to help next time if I'm available.



You may need to create some time and space before you give an answer. This could provide a more thoughtful response that could lead to a better outcome. Remember, it is okay to ask for time to consider a request.

The Win-Win Goal

Look for a win-win solution that allows both sides to be satisfied with the outcome. Before making a decision, take the necessary time to weigh the pros and cons, whether it is work related, family oriented or for your organization. When we are approached



to do something for work or personally, there are expectations from both sides. We want to feel good about our decisions and we want the other party to have positive feelings as well. If we have the attitude of consideration, we are starting out on the right track.

Think outside the box. If you are not able to do what is being asked without sacrificing other priorities, can you offer to help in another way? For example, if you are asked to volunteer for a weekly shift at a soup kitchen but cannot do so, can you donate some canned food? Can you help recruit other people who are available to volunteer for that shift? Look for solutions that preserve your time and benefit both parties.

Feel Good About Your No and Be Confident

You've made it through the hardest part! You said no with grace and avoided the automatic "yes."

At this stage, it is common to feel guilty – but don't change your mind now. Remind yourself of the reasons that you decided to say no in the first place. Remember what you are safeguarding. If you change your answer, you will be taking time away from the things that are more important to you, which will also make you feel guilty. Before you change your mind, ask yourself, "What were the reasons that I said no to this request?" For example, did you say no so you can spend more time with your family? Are you willing to give that up?



Avoid Pressure Tactics and Be Firm

You may come across someone who will not take no for an answer. It can be especially difficult to say no to someone who is overly persistent. Consider





repeating the original reason you gave by firmly stating that you are not able to divert time away from another project or priority. For example, “My family/spouse would be very upset if I took on any more obligations.” If the person will not accept your answer, excuse yourself and end the conversation.

Club Activity: Write priorities/projects on multiple balloons (i.e., family, volunteering, exercise, meals, pets, etc.).

Option 1: Ask club members to sit or stand in a circle. As a group, try to keep one balloon in the air by tapping it from person to person. Next, add another balloon. Continue to add balloons until the group cannot keep them afloat. Discuss with club members how easy or hard it was to keep one, two or more balloons afloat. When we take on too many priorities, we cannot complete any of them. It is important to say no, so we can focus our energy on what is important.

Option 2: Ask for a volunteer. Hand the volunteer balloons one at a time, reading the priority on each balloon out loud. Discuss how hard it was to balance balloons as the priorities are piled on.

References

Ury, William. *The Power of a Positive No*. 2007. Hodder & Stoughton, London, England.

www.pon.harvard.edu/daily/win-win-daily/win-win-negotiations-managing-your-counterparts-satisfaction/

www.cci.health.wa.gov.au/docs/Assertmodule%206.pdf

www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052702303795904579431093572107898

www.cnn.com/2008/LIVING/personal/10/29/rs.how.to.say.no/index.html?_s=PM:LIVING

2016

Programs and activities offered by the West Virginia University Extension Service are available to all persons without regard to race, color, sex, disability, religion, age, veteran status, political beliefs, sexual orientation, national origin, and marital or family status.

The WVU Board of Governors is the governing body of WVU. The Higher Education Policy Commission in West Virginia is responsible for developing, establishing, and overseeing the implementation of a public policy agenda for the state's four-year colleges and universities.

