



How to Say No with Grace & Without Guilt

Love Deeply Tool



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If you're like me, you have a tough time saying, "No." As a recovering people-pleaser, I want to be helpful to people. I just hate disappointing them.



In this tool, I share some practical strategies I've learned—and am learning—for saying, "No," in a way that honors the person making the request and keeps me free to focus on what matters most.



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If we are going to accomplish our goals, we must learn to say no to those requests that threaten to take us off task and consume our resources.

If we don't get better at saying, "No," here's what we risk:

- Other people's priorities will take precedence over ours.
- Mere acquaintances—people we barely know!—will crowd out time with family and close
- We will not have the time we need for rest and
- We will end up frustrated and
- We won't be able to say, "Yes," to the really important

I recently heard Andy Stanley talking about this topic on his leadership podcast. He said,

The harsh reality of leadership is that the more successful we are, the less accessible we become. As things grow and as more people become involved, a leader can't be equally accessible to all people. So then we are faced with the dilemma of who gets my time and who doesn't, when do they get it, and how much of it do they get."



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Your time is a zero-sum game. When you say yes to one thing, you are simultaneously saying no to something else. The more successful you get, the more difficult this becomes. You find yourself saying no to good things—worthy things—in order to say yes to your most important priorities.

Here are eight practical suggestions for saying no without feeling guilty:

1. Acknowledge your resources are

- You don't have an endless supply of time or You're not Superman or Superwoman. You're a finite human being with lots to offer, to be sure, but not unlimited resources. You already know how to apply this concept to your finances.

You don't have an endless stream of money, right? So you make sure that the important things like paying your mortgage if you have one or buying groceries get done first. The same is true for your time and energy. You only have so much, so you need to spend it on what counts first. Acknowledge that your time is finite. Again, it's a zero-sum game.



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2. Determine who needs access to you and who doesn't.

- Now, this is especially important for You can get so busy responding to everyone's ideas, requests, and demands that no time is left for what matters most. The important priorities, both people and projects, get put on the backburner. Again, your resources are finite. You can only serve so many people well, so make sure you're prioritizing the ones who really need your attention.

3. Take practical steps to limit your accessibility.

- This is one of my Block time on your calendar for your desires and activities and your greatest priorities first. That way, when someone makes a request for your time, you can simply say that you already have another commitment, and you do.
- Everyone understands If they want more detail (99 percent of the people won't ask), you can say you're on a deadline for a project, and you've already allotted that time to work on it. This time is already spent, and that's the easiest way to say no.

4. Make a list of common

5. Adopt a strategy for responding to these

- Now, working out your strategy in advance will make it so much easier to follow through in the If you're like me, it's easy to succumb to pressure if you haven't predetermined how you will respond.



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William Ury outlines four strategies in his book, *The Power of a Positive No*:

- *Accommodation*: We say Yes when we want to say No. This happens when we value the relationship of the person making the request above the importance of our own
- *Attack*: We say no This is a result of valuing our own interests above the importance of the relationship. Sometimes we are fearful or resentful of the request and overreact to the person asking.
- *Avoidance*: We say nothing at all. Because we are afraid of offending the other party, we say nothing, hoping the problem will go It rarely does.
- *Affirmation*: We use a formula of “Yes-No-” This is in contrast to the ordinary “No” which begins with a No and ends with a No. A positive No begins with a “Yes” and ends with a “Yes.”

“A positive no has three parts. First of all, **it begins with yes.** Saying yes to yourself and protecting what is important to you. I would also add the importance of affirming the other person. You don’t want to shame others for making the request. **Then you move from a yes to a no.** It continues with a matter-of-fact no that sets clear boundaries. Warning: avoid leaving the door open by saying maybe. “Maybe I can say yes to your request in the future.” **Then it ends with a yes.**



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A positive no ends with a yes that affirms the relationship and offers another solution to the person's request. Let me give you an example. I'm often asked by aspiring authors to review their book proposal. I typically get several of these requests a week. Here's how I respond using the yes-no-yes formula.

First of all, I begin with a yes. "Congratulations on your new proposal! Very few authors make it this far. Thanks for your interest in having me review it." Then I move to a no. "Unfortunately, due to my other commitments, I am no longer able to review proposals. Therefore, I must decline."

I didn't say, "Maybe I'll look at it later." I was very firm in my boundary. Then I conclude with a yes. "However, I can give you some guidance on how to get published. If you haven't already done so, may I recommend that you start by reading my blog post "Advice to First-Time Authors." You can see there I give a link.

"In it, I offer step-by-step instructions for what to do first. I also have an entire audio course, which distills my 30-plus years of publishing experience into 21 learning sessions. I hope you will find this helpful."

By the way, interestingly, I rarely have anyone pressure me after receiving an email like this. They typically respond by saying, "No problem. I get it. Thanks for getting back to me."



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Occasionally, you're going to get a negative response. It's not that often, but it does happen, and I want you to be prepared for it, which brings me to the sixth tip.

6. Accept the fact that you will be misunderstood.

- You know, you can say no as graciously as possible and for all of the right reasons, but there will still be the occasional person who is disappointed in your. Disappointing some people in life is inevitable.
- Listen to Just make sure you're not disappointing the ones who matter most like yourself or your family. If their disappointment requires another response (often it doesn't), I express empathy but restate my no. If you don't respect your own boundaries, no one else will either.

7. Use e-mail templates to say no with grace.

8. Delegate to people you trust.

So push comes to shove, I want you to honor your commitments. I think it's a matter of personal integrity. But if you dread participating in something or know that it's not the best use of your time, your involvement probably isn't going to be a win for the other party either, or at least not as much of a win as they had hoped, which I think is sufficient reason for you to revisit the commitment. **What I want to suggest are four steps for trying to negotiate out of an existing commitment.**



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1. **Take responsibility for making the** You know, saying, “I didn’t realize what I was getting into,” or, “I felt pressured to make this commitment,” is an attempt to shift the blame. Don’t do that. It’s only going to make the other party defensive or angry.
2. **Reaffirm your willingness to honor your** It will not make you look good or serve your desire to negotiate out of the commitment if you attempt to weasel out of it and minimize your commitment. This creates distrust and will ultimately damage your reputation.
3. **Explain why honoring your commitment is not the best outcome for the other party.** You know, unfortunately, no one really cares about the impact on That’s just reality. Most people think of themselves first. From their perspective, you made the commitment. Now you need to fulfill it. But when you help them see that this might not be in their best interest, then they suddenly become more interested in helping solve the problem, which leads me to step four.
4. **Offer to help solve the problem with** Don’t shift the burden off of your back by dumping it on theirs. They’ll resent it. Instead, offer to help find an alternative solution. Make it clear that you won’t abdicate your commitment until you find a mutually satisfactory solution.

For example, let’s say you committed to serving on a committee, but you now realize you have neither the passion nor the proficiency to do it well. You might want to go back and say something like this. “I now realize I made a mistake in accepting this committee assignment.” That’s **step one**, take responsibility.



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“Because I made the commitment, I want to honor it, and I’m willing to fulfill my term.” That’s **step two**. “But honestly, I don’t think that really serves the committee, the board, or this institution. You need someone who is really passionate about the mission and proficient in some areas where the board needs outside expertise. I have the passion but not the expertise you really need. At best, my expertise duplicates what you already have. As a result, I’m taking a seat that someone more qualified should have.”

That’s **step three**, explain why honoring your commitment wouldn’t be best for them. “Would you be willing to release me from my commitment if we could together find someone who is better suited to this assignment? I think this would be a win for me, for you, and for this committee.” That’s step four, offer to help solve the problem.

Now I’ve had to do this several times, and I have yet to have someone get upset with me. If they say no, fine. I keep my original commitment, and I give it my best effort.

Why? Because I gave my word to it, and I take my commitments seriously.



Thank You!

We hope you found this tool helpful for you and your partner. If you're looking for more helpful resources like this one, check out our website.

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