



The subtle art of saying No at workplace

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Will you be surprised If I say a simple two-letter word can do wonders in your professional lives? Unfortunately, it is not as simple as it sounds.

Imagine a scenario, where you have a list of tasks piled up for the day, and your coworker comes to your desk and asks for an urgent help. Will you agree to help him? Will you be considered too selfish if you reject? Will you offend him if you say no? Do you fear of missing out (FOMO) on future opportunities?

These are few of the multiple questions that pop up when we are confronted with such situations in our professional lives.

Warren Buffet once said, *“The difference between successful people and really successful people is that really successful people say no to almost everything”*.

The art of saying no with grace is an art to be learnt.

Here are ten practical steps which will help to take the bull by the horns.

1) Be Confident and Straight forward:

Imagine a scenario, where you are swamped with multiple projects. Your co-worker comes up to your desk and asks, *“Hey, can you help me with this project? Am a little clueless here”*.

When you are constrained for time, be open and communicate. Don't beat around the bush. It is always better to communicate clearly. Having the confidence to tell people that you are busy helps. Assert yourself without being too aggressive. At the same time, be polite, honest, and gracious while explaining your point of view.

2) And for that reason, Am out Smile :

When someone approaches you for help and you feel that you are not the competent person, it is better to communicate upfront. Tell them clearly that you are not the subject matter expert and hence, you cannot be of much help. Be it lack of bandwidth or lack of knowledge, clear communication along with reasons goes a long way.

3) Try Other words:

Many people associate 'No' with personal rejection. Certain people don't take no for an answer. How to deal with such people?

The answer is simple - It is just a matter of finding alternative ways to communicate the same message without saying the word 'No'. If we explain clearly and convince the other person about the reasons, it implicitly conveys 'No'. The only thing to keep in mind here is that the reasons are genuine. Always avoid lying or giving fake reasons.

4) Play to your strengths:

Generally, ensure that when you say yes, it is around your areas of interest and the areas you are best at. Knowing about your strengths and preferred areas of interest gives you an idea of when to reject. If you feel that certain requests are better handled by others, it helps if you refer the requestor to a better-equipped person. By turning down such requests, you are actually helping the other person by guiding him to a person who is in a better position to assist him.

5) Offer Alternatives:

Sometimes, along with a genuine 'No', offering alternatives helps. Imagine that the company Board meeting is in a couple of days and your co-worker approaches for some help. Consider offering alternatives like the one below in those cases:

“Ravi, am extremely busy this week because of the board meeting. I think Yash can offer you some help in this case”

Options can take multiple forms – it can be mentioning names of others who might help, offering to help partly, etc. This approach ensures that you care for your co-worker and are ready to offer solutions.

6) Can you come back after some time?

There might be situations when you are tight-pressed for time and someone needs your assistance. You want to help, but you are not able to accommodate the person at that point in time. Asking that person to come back after a certain time helps in such cases. A simple reply like, *“Hey. I have an urgent deadline to meet now. Can you come back after 3 pm?”* helps. This reply conveys your willingness to help. Also, there is always the possibility that the requestor might find someone else if the request is urgent. This is a win-win for everyone.

7) Be Resolute and Graceful

There will always be a few people who refuse to take no for an answer. They will persist even if you turn down their requests politely. Once you have taken a well-thought-out decision, be resolute and turn down the request. A measured reply like the below one always helps.

“Look, Divya. I heard you fully. But, considering my lack of expertise in the subject, I strongly feel that am not the best person to help you in this case. Maybe, you can check with the design team, as I feel they might be able to offer you some help.”

8) Confront FOMO:

The Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) is a psychological phenomenon and affects our decision-making. Many a time, we say yes, despite knowing fully that we lack the resources to finish the task. There are multiple new opportunities or projects which come up in our professional lives. And taking on these projects might even advance our career. But, decision-making should always be based on our strengths and interests, rather than a FOMO-induced call.

In the long run, a shoddily executed project will cause more harm to your career than the other way around. Confronting FOMO takes a lot of time, patience, and self-awareness. The next time when you are presented with an opportunity, take a moment to think through it before saying an instinctive 'Yes'.

9) Saying 'No' is not bad after all:

Are you someone who feels guilty after saying 'No' to someone? It's a response that is ingrained in our minds since childhood. Throughout your school life, you gradually learnt that people hate hearing 'No' for an answer. Over the years, psychology builds up in such a way that you think twice before rejecting any request. By the time we enter our professional lives, many of us feel, saying 'No' makes us bad people. An informed 'No' is any day better than being a 'Yes Man'. Tell to yourself that saying 'No' is not bad after all.

10) Be Honest:

In the end, it is important to be honest while we make decisions. Saying 'No' to your boss or your colleagues requires a diplomatic approach. It is important to be strategic and to have a very solid reason for saying 'No'. With your boss, be careful to not come across as insubordinate and explain your standpoint honestly. And, with your colleagues, don't come across as entitled or standoffish.

Always remember, people who give a confident yes or a well-reasoned no are the ones who will make a mark in their career.

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