

“The Joy of No”

No.... Just hearing that word brings a feeling of joy to my heart. Why? Because I now know the freedom and peace which uttering this one simple word can bring to my life. I have had to learn the hard way the pain of being a “yes woman” and piling too many projects and responsibilities onto the plate of my life. But I am now enlightened to the power and serenity which is possible when one replaces “yes” with “no” on a more regular basis.

Let’s begin with a simple scenario... You receive a phone call from a local organization asking you to participate on a committee or a fund-raiser. It seems innocuous enough and besides, it’s for a good cause. So you say yes and feel good about it at the time. Then the other shoe drops... You learn that you’ll need to attend bi-weekly meetings plus spend numerous hours working on projects related to your newly appointed role. The nice idea of helping out turns into almost a second job and you find yourself spending more and more time on your new project. Sadly, you find that you now have less time for your hobbies, your family, and your friends. This may be okay if you feel passionately about what you are doing and if it’s in line with your highest values or fulfills one of your most important goals. But often, this is not the case.

Please don’t get me wrong. I’m not saying that you should never say yes when approached to lend a helping hand or to contribute to a worthy cause. What I *am* saying is that some careful contemplation and consideration is necessary before saying yes. Make sure you get as much information as possible about what you’re being asked to do. Ask *lots* of good questions to find out the specific responsibilities of the role, as well as the time requirements. After getting this information, do a quick check-in with yourself to see what your gut answer is, yes or no. Trust your intuition; there is a tremendous amount of innate wisdom to be found there.

If your answer is not a definite yes or no, what I’ve found to be helpful is to delay before giving an answer. A good way to buy some extra time is to say something like, “I need to look at my current responsibilities to determine if I will be able to give this project the attention it deserves. I’ll get back to you with my answer tomorrow.” This type of response will give you some time to carefully consider the request and to determine whether it fits into your life in a positive way. If the requestor demands an answer immediately, say no. It’s better to err on the side of caution than to commit to something which you may regret later.

If you have delayed your answer to a request, take some time to answer the following questions during your consideration period:

1. **Is this project or task something I want to do?** *If it is something you feel you should do but it doesn’t excite you, that’s a good sign that you might want to say no to the request.*

2. **What am I willing to say NO to in my life if I decide to take on this new project?** *It's a good practice not to take on anything new unless you first let go of an existing responsibility. This will help you to avoid overwhelm.*
3. **Which of my core values or primary goals will this project honor or fulfill?** *If the answer is "none of them," say no! Find a project which will excite you, as well as honor your values and enable you to meet a treasured goal.*

A good rule of thumb is to remember one of Stephen Covey's famous quotes, "The enemy of the best is the good." There are many projects out there which are valuable and which seem like a nice idea at the outset. But if you are spending so much time working on things which are good but not great, you won't have time to engage in pursuits which you'll really enjoy and which will bring you lasting fulfillment. You don't need to say no to everything which comes your way, but for those of us who are more prone to saying yes, it may be helpful to err on the side of caution. Remember the wisdom of the famous anti-drug slogan, "Just Say No!" It applies to many other situations in life...