

I recently received an email from an acquaintance asking if he could stay with me while visiting New York City. Mind you, this was someone who I wasn't very close to, and he had the means to book a hotel. I simply did not feel comfortable having him stay. I had three options: 1. I could say yes because I felt bad saying no, and end up feeling miserable for saying yes; 2. I could say no and maybe feel bad about saying it; or 3. I could say no and not feel bad about saying it. I went with option three.

You might wonder, how do you say no and not feel bad about it? To answer that, you must first understand why people feel bad turning someone down. Saying no may feel aggressive, like you're rejecting the person. Most people do not want to be an aggressor. There's a negative connotation to it. Or they may feel like the bad guy or gal. They may feel they're letting the person down and feel guilty. Or they may even feel they won't be liked or will be perceived as uncaring and unhelpful. As a result, people usually go the path of least potential conflict and comply with others.

If people do say no, they usually do it in ineffective ways that come with an excuse. For example, they might say, "I'd like to help but I'm really busy." The problem with this approach is it gives the other person an opportunity to continue to ask. He or she feels there's an opening. "Since you're busy this week, how about next week?"

Here's how you can effectively say no:

Article continues after video.

FEATURED VIDEO

Forget Big-Picture: Why You Should Build Mental Toughness Through Small Steps

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1. Say it.

Don't beat around the bush or offer weak excuses or hem and haw. This only provides an opening for the other person. Don't delay or stall either. Provide a brief explanation if you feel you need to; however, don't feel compelled. The less said the better.

2. Be assertive and courteous.

You might say, "I'm sorry I can't right now but will let you know when and if I can." This approach is polite, and puts you in a position of power by changing the

dynamic. You're taking charge, telling people you'll let them know when and if you can. Another example, "I appreciate your asking me for help, but I'm stretched too thin right now to devote the time to be of quality help to you."

3. Understand peoples' tactics.

Many people and organizations use manipulation techniques, whether knowingly or not. For example, think about when you get a solicitation for a donation to a charity and there are forced options: "Would you like to donate \$10, \$20, \$30, or X amount?" Another tactic: "Most people donate \$20--how much would you like to donate?" This relies on social pressure.

4. Set boundaries.

People sometimes have a hard time saying no because they haven't taken the time to evaluate their relationships and understand their role within the relationship. When you truly understand the dynamic and your role, you won't feel as worried about the consequences of saying no. You'll realize that your relationship is solid and can withstand your saying no.

5. Put the question back on the person asking.

This is highly effective in a work situation. Let's say a supervisor is asking you to take on several tasks--more than you can handle. You might say, "I'm happy to do X, Y, and Z; however, I would need three weeks, rather than two, to do a good job. How would you like me to prioritize them?"

6. Be firm.

If someone can't accept your no, then you know the person is probably not a true friend or doesn't respect you. Stand firm, and don't feel compelled to give in just

because that person is uncomfortable.

7. Be selfish.

Put your needs first. Not those of the person asking you for something. If you prioritize that person's needs over yours, you'll find your productivity will suffer and resentment will mount. Perhaps we can learn from Warren Buffett, who said, "The difference between successful people and very successful people is that very successful people say no to almost everything."

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have the means to, miserable, wonder, connotation, beat around the bush, compel, be stretched thin, manipulate, prioritize, resentment

When was the last time someone asked you to do them a favor? What was the favor and did you agree to do it? If you refused, why did you refuse?

What kind of favors make you uncomfortable?

Do you more often say yes or no?

Do you feel compelled to help a friend?

When have you felt like the bad guy/gal?

When has someone said no to you? Did you feel let down?

Which techniques from the article have you used? Were you successful?

Do you tend to beat around the bush or do you come straight to the point?

When do you feel stretched too thin?

Has any person or organization manipulated you?

What are you prioritizing now?

When have you had to be selfish?