

Quick Guide: How To Say “No”!

On our [assertiveness courses](#) participants often say that they don't like saying 'no' to requests. They say that they feel guilty; feel that they should always say 'yes' to seniors; that they want to please the person asking; that they want to be liked; and so on. Sound familiar? If there are times when you say 'yes' but really want to say 'no', here are the **top ten tips** to help you handle these situations.

- 1. Take a pause.** Listen to the request and don't give an immediate answer. You could also give yourself some time to plan a response by saying 'leave it with me and I'll come back to you later today'.
- 2. Clarify the request.** Sometimes people with urgent requests are not thinking clearly about what they want. By clarifying the request you are able to work out what they want and so find a solution together. It also shows that you are trying to understand their situation by showing empathy for this, and for them.
- 3. Keep it brief.** As soon as you start to give lengthy explanations you weaken your position and the other person starts to question what you are saying.
- 4. Don't be too sorry.** Add a specific apology if you wish to and think it will help the situation. However, excessive apologising could undermine your case.
- 5. Look and sound like you mean no.** If your body language and tone of voice are saying 'maybe' when you are saying 'no', the other person is getting a mixed message. People believe more of what they see and hear, than of the words you are saying.
- 6. Offer alternatives.** If appropriate, you could suggest another person to do the task, or at another time. You are still being helpful without saying 'yes'.
- 7. Reach a compromise.** This is often what you end up doing, particularly when dealing with a senior person. So say 'no' and offer a compromise at the same time. For example, if you can't stay late, offer to come in earlier tomorrow.
- 8. Look for a 'chink in their armour'** such as an apology in their voice, or a slight reluctance to ask, or fidgeting. These are tell-tale signs of wavering and clues that your 'no' will be accepted without challenge or with little resistance.
- 9. Beware of 'distant elephants'!** A task in the distant future often looks smaller now so you are more likely to say 'yes'. It is important to say you will look into how it will fit in with your workload and that you will come back to them.
- 10. Use the 'broken record' technique.** Useful when faced with a persuasive or persistent person. You need to repeat your 'no message' so that they hear it again and again. This is not easy, but if done well it shows that you mean what you are saying.

Finally, a word of warning! Please don't start practising these tips by saying 'no' to every request! Reserve them for when you need to say 'no' assertively. Good luck.

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