

HOW TO SAY NO



HOW TO LEARN
TO SAY 'NO' WHEN
YOU TRULY DON'T
HAVE TIME

As an author, speaker and coach on productivity, I'm often asked about competing priorities and the need to say "no". It can be challenging and uncomfortable to say no in a work situation however we can quickly become overwhelmed and out of control, leading to stress and burnout, if say yes to everything.

Saying "no" often leads to feelings of guilt or anxiety because we can feel like we are not collaborating, co-operating or being a team player when in fact it's the opposite that is true. Setting boundaries that allow you to show up as your best and most productive self will enable you to be a better team player.

It starts with defining your boundaries.

When people think of boundaries, many assume we are talking about rules that govern personal space. Healthy work-related boundaries go much deeper. They define

how much of yourself you give to your career and guide how you form relationships with managers, colleagues, and clients. They also help make time for the important things, like the people and activities in your life outside of work.

Boundaries set basic guidelines for the way you want to be treated, and ensure relationships are mutually respectful, appropriate, and caring. They can mean the difference between career/work fulfilment and burnout.

When it comes to setting boundaries, ask yourself:

- Who am I willing, or not, to give time to?
- What do I want, or not want, to do or achieve?
- When do I need to protect time, and when do I want to make myself available?
- Where can I put in place contextual markers about the physical locations of work, play and rest?
- Why would I give one person or activity attention over another?

One of the toughest things to do when setting boundaries is sticking to them by saying “no”.

Here are 4 things to consider when it comes to saying no.

Assume reasonableness

Many people assume they have no choice but to say yes because the person making the request is more senior or influential or unreasonable. If you always assume people are unreasonable, then you will end up saying “yes” and later feeling resentful. If you assume people are reasonable, flexible or able to compromise, the interaction will be more productive.

Explain why

By giving a clear explanation as to why you are unable to take on this work or project will improve your chances of a more favourable response. This is not about making excuses but giving a sound reason why you are saying no.

Give alternatives or compromise

If it is a timing thing, you may say that you can't do it today, but could do it later in the week. If you are at, or close to, capacity, you might say you can take on a small part of the work. You may even suggest that someone else may have more capacity to take on the work. There is almost always room to compromise.

Be selective

We can't say no to everything, or we will get a reputation for being difficult or a non-contributor. We all have had to do things that we don't personally enjoy and saying no just because you don't like something is not a valid reason.

Finally, here are some words or phrases you can use that can help with saying no.

- Thank you for thinking of me and unfortunately, I can't commit to this as I have already prioritised [other work] for this week.
- I have a lot on my plate right now and can't take on anything more.
- Now is not a great time as my schedule is full until [date]. Did you want to schedule a time in a few weeks to revisit this?
- I'm not sure I'm the right person for this given my expertise. This feels more like something [person's name] would be more suited for.

If this is something that is uncomfortable for you, rehearse them so that they can roll effortless off the tongue.

Ultimately, saying no and creating boundaries will make you easier to work with. You will have a reputation for being open, upfront and direct rather than committing to things you don't have the capacity for and being late or resentful.

Donna McGeorge is a best-selling author and global authority on productivity. Her book series, *It's About time* covers meetings, structuring your day, and doing more with less is available in bookstores around Australia or can be ordered online via Donna's website at www.donnamcgeorge.com