



InterVision Group, LLC

Just Say No

By Debby Stone, JD, CPCC

When you are asked to do something do you automatically say yes? Do you find it difficult to say no because you want to please people or avoid conflict? Do you often agree to things and then wish you could back out? Many people have difficulty saying no when asked to perform a task, provide assistance, volunteer to help or take on additional responsibility. No is a small word, but it is frequently the one word that stands in the way of greater productivity and satisfaction in our daily lives.

Why do we say yes when we want to say no? When you asked to chair the company's performance review committee, you may initially think it is easier to agree than to refuse. By saying yes, you feel important, you avoid conflict and you make others happy. However, in the long run if joining the committee is not something you are truly committed to doing, the person who will most likely get let down is you. You find yourself knee deep in meetings and paperwork wishing you had simply had the courage or the quickness to just say no.

In addition, if you continue to say yes to obligations when you really want to say no, you will find that you will resent the very people you agreed to help. Frequently when we agree to things that we don't really want to do, we find that we later blame the person who asked us to get involved for having roped us into another chore. In reality, you only have yourself to blame.

So what do you do when the phone rings and you are unprepared or caught off guard by a request. First, ask for more time to consult your calendar. This way you can collect your thoughts and figure out how to refuse gracefully. If you say no with kindness and honesty, it will actually be received better than if you tell a white lie. In the end, you will gain respect and your relationships with flourish because you were honest.

In order to be prepared to say no, it is also necessary to keep your priorities in mind. Recognize what is important in your life. Then, if you are asked to participate in an activity or work on a project that is unrelated to one of your priorities, it is easier to say no. Consider reminding yourself of your

priorities by writing them out and tacking them near the phone or on the bathroom mirror.

Having clear boundaries and sticking to them also helps you become clear on when to say no and then not backing down. Often it is easier to say no initially than it is to stick with it. Once you have said no, there is frequently a counter-proposal or some arm-twisting that will follow. Remember why you said no in the first place and stand firm. It may help to picture your children or your spouse and think of how doing what you are asked will affect your time with them. If the effect is negative, it will be easier to be firm.

At first it will be difficult to flex the muscle of saying no. However, just as in sports, practice will make you better at it. The muscle will grow stronger, and the more you say no, the easier it will become. Keep in mind that by saying no, you are also saying yes to the things in your life that are really a priority.

Creative Ways to Say No:

1. Keep it simple. Just say no without any explanation. "Thanks but I am sorry, that's impossible."
2. Offer an alternative. "I can't chair the committee but I am happy to be a member."
3. Use humor. "Are you kidding? That's something I'll never do!" Then give an honest explanation.
4. Put a positive spin on it. "I would love to help but I am really busy right now, and I don't want to keep you waiting."
5. Refuse via email or voicemail rather than in person or by phone.