

## Why Is It Hard To Say No?

For such a small word, “no” can sometimes be very hard to say! Many people find it almost impossible to say “no”, but saying “yes” when you really want to say “no” inevitably leads to problems. It means that you end up agreeing to do things you can’t do, in which case you disappoint or irritate other people, or it means that you end up doing things you don’t want to and are left feeling frustrated with yourself and resentful of other people.

Saying “no” may be difficult because we fear that other people might disapprove of us, or be angry with us. In fact, people often respect people who demonstrate self respect by not being too concerned about the opinion of others. Some people believe that saying “no” where it involves setting their own interests above those of others is selfish. For these people, saying “no” leads to tremendous feelings of guilt and remorse. They don’t realise that they have a responsibility to look after themselves and set limits on the demands others put on them.

A reluctance to say “no” may also indicate unrealistically high or inappropriate standards. For example someone may believe they must always help others, or do their fair share, no matter what. Beliefs about what must, should or ought to happen tend to create unnecessary tensions and strains in life. It’s far better to think in terms of preferences: it’s preferable that we help other people and do favours for them, but not absolutely imperative.

Two classical techniques of persuasion rely upon people’s reluctance to say “no”. The Foot-in-the-Door technique involves reducing resistance by asking a person to do a very small simple favour first, and then asking for the bigger favour. Door-in-the-Face technique works in the opposite way. By asking for a very big favour that is unreasonable and will inevitably be refused, the persuader hopes to encourage the person to feel guilty for refusing so that they will then be pleased to comply with a second lesser request.

Of course, I’m not arguing that you should say no to every request, but rather than you should say what you mean and mean what you say. Bear in mind, that a “yes” which should have been a “no” can have very dire consequences. Nervous exhaustion, unhappy relationships, low self-esteem and many other psychological problems can be the result of a simple failure to say “no”.

The best way to say “no” is immediately, at the beginning of your response, and then follow up with any explanations or modifying statements. If you begin with anything else in an attempt to soften your sentence, you will give the impression that you can be persuaded otherwise. Remind yourself of your reasons for saying no; remember that you have a responsibility to take care of yourself, and that your life and the time you have belongs to you and that you have a right to spend your time as you see fit. Take a deep breathe, look the other person in the eye, relax your face, and in a firm clear voice, say it: “no!”

© ADAM MAY, MA (Hons), ADHP (NC), MNRHP, UKCP Reg, 2 Fron Heulog, Llanddaniel  
Fab, Gaerwen, Sir Fôn, LL60 6EP.  
Phone. 01248 421015. e mail: [adam@adammay.co.uk](mailto:adam@adammay.co.uk)

Responses to this article are warmly welcomed.

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