

Speak with Confidence and Authority

Video Course

BONUS Lesson Worksheet: Declining with grace

Somebody has respected you enough to ask you to do something. They deserve your reply. Your reply should be honest and gracious and fair to yourself. If you say yes to something that you have no energy for or no interest in or this request is not a priority for you, then you are not being fair to yourself and you are not being honest. It may feel easier to not answer at all, but your lack of clear communication puts someone else in a difficult position. There are all sorts of ways to say no with grace. Practice these phrases and make up a few of your own so they are at hand when you need them.

- *Let' me check my schedule first and I come back to you within X hours/days x.*
- *If you need an immediate answer, I have to decline*
- *Thank you so much for thinking about me but I have to pass*
- *I would love to help you out, but I already made commitments to others (coworkers, clients, etc.) to complete their projects today. It wouldn't be fair to them to not follow through on what I said I would do. I will be sure to fit this in as soon as possible. Thanks for your understanding.*
- *Could you email me the details of that request? Once I receive them, I'll be able to give you a more definite response on when I can get that done for you.*
- *I would love to help you out, but given my schedule, I wouldn't be able to get this back to you for a couple of weeks. If you would like to have this turned around sooner, I recommend that you reach out to person X. Does that sound good?*

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- *No, I have other priorities at the moment that keep me busy*
- *Could I come back to you on this later this week? I will need to check my agenda and see if I have some time to deal with your request. I'll get back to you by x day, ok?*
- *No, I can't do that, but I can do...*
- *No, I'm not available to commit to something like that at this time, but I appreciate you asking me.*
- *No, that isn't something I'm really great at, but maybe X would be a good resource*
- *No, I'm really busy at the moment, but you can find the information needed there and there*
- *No, that is out of my scope, but here's how you can get it done...*
- *No. Thank you so much for asking, but I can't do that. Let me know if I can help in another way (only if you really mean and want to help).*

Don't feel like you have to lie. Many people will see right through you. Don't feel like you have to elaborate. Nobody wants to hear it. Do be honest and genuine and authentic.

Saying NO to a request from a superior (e.g. your manager)

Do not reply straight, take your time, define your negotiation strategy and confidently present arguments for your rejection.

- Ask your boss to help you to prioritize your project list so you could better understand what is most important for your team now.

- Sit down with your manager for a short chat and check your yearly and monthly objectives, where you show him/her what are you working on, what are the deadlines and if he/she is ok to cut on quality or timely delivery of those projects if you take another one.
- If your manager still does not know where to place this additional task you can propose various ideas on how it could be dealt best (postponing, delegating, giving to another department for more research, etc.)

Exercise: Practice Saying "NO"

You can do this exercise with or without a partner, or even without anyone else's knowledge. It involves teaching yourself to set your own boundaries, by becoming more comfortable with saying "No". It may sound silly, but you can "teach" yourself to say "no" more effectively, and without guilt, by practicing.

If you decide to let your family or friends in on your exercise, you might choose to make the exercise a little harder by choosing something to say "no" to that you might ordinarily say "yes" to.

Here's how it works:

For a week or two, pick something each day that you wouldn't normally say "no" to. Then, instead of saying "yes" automatically-- say "NO"! It doesn't have to be something terribly important; just something that others would normally take for granted.

For example, if you're out shopping with the kids, and they always ask for ice cream, and you'd rather not get it but usually do it anyway because it's easier than fighting over it- then don't! Say "NO" and then don't back down.

Or when a telemarketer calls and you don't want to hurt their feelings, you let them finish their chat and then set an appointment you don't intend to keep- don't!

Say "No, thank you, I'm not interested" in the first 10 seconds or so, and be done with it.

After you become more confident in saying no in those simple situations, move to saying "no" in the more complex situation at work, with family and friends.

Keep a record of how you feel when you say "no" in your journal or notebook for the whole time period. Notice if you feel differently about saying "no" when you get to the end of your time period than you did at the beginning. If not, consider doing the exercise for a longer.

Strive for saying "NO" without feeling guilty. Recognize that you have a right to say "NO" whenever you wish, and to feel good about doing so.