

# How to say “No”

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**F**ew weeks ago, we received a business proposal from an associate with whom we had successfully undertaken quite a few projects. The proposal was based on something we had orally discussed and agreed upon in the past. However, quite some time had lapsed since our last conversation and situation also changed due to which we decided to enter into an alternate venture. We were no longer interested in the opportunity, but were not quite sure as to how to inform it to him. We didn't want to endanger our business relationship and any future potential opportunities.

Therefore, we delayed in replying to his mail and put it as the last priority. Every few days when we check the pending list, it would be there and we thought we would reply later. At times we contemplated not replying at all, but we thought it would not be appropriate, especially since we knew each other for such a long time. Finally one fine morning, we decided to get ahead by sending reply to his email. We apologized for our delayed response, and at the same time genuinely explained our situation with a conclusion that we had no plans to take up the opportunity anymore. After reading the mail carefully, we clicked "Send" button and hoped for the best. It was early in the morning and we didn't think that our associate would be in the office. Within few minutes of sending the mail, we got a surprising reply. The reply was very genial. Our associate said there were no



worries at all, and he wished us success for our new venture in the days to come.

Have any of us ever had to say “No” before and feel conflicted about doing so? I am sure many of us have to regularly pass through such trauma in our professional and personal life. We often make a big deal out of saying “No”, afraid that we may commit a dreadful crime by replying negatively. In our minds, we are scared that other people will be angry, that we shall be hated, that we'll be deemed as making things difficult for others.

The actual reality is, many of these thoughts are self-created, and may not be applicable at all. Saying “No” is our own privilege, and should not be as difficult as we make it out to be. Here are some thoughts that can be useful to make sure we do not find ourselves doing something that we would prefer not to do.

### When to say No??

Was our inclination to say “Yes”, even though there's a voice deep down saying “no”? If yes, let's raise the volume on that inner voice. What could be possible reasons for saying no?

- We have no interest
- It is beyond our means
- It is beyond our comfort level

Note down all our reasons for saying “No” and identify which stem from a lack of confidence versus a sincere apathy in fulfilling the request.

What would happen if we say “Yes”? Perhaps:

- It would make our colleagues happy
- We would be considered as a team player
- Our visibility with seniors would be improved

It comes down to a simple cost – benefit analysis. Whether the benefits outweigh our temporary discomforts? Would the discomfort involved in saying yes outweigh the benefits of possibly going along with the request? Following 3, stages are involved:



*“You gain strength, courage, and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face. You are able to say to yourself, “I lived through this horror. I can take the next thing that comes along.” - Eleanor Roosevelt*

- Before Saying "No" – Guilt factor prevails  
Saying "No" is difficult for many of us and guilt often comes into play in such cases. Whether this guilt has its foundation in religion or a general perception, we often recognize it and make decisions, we would rather not be making.
- While Saying "No" – Practice is the must  
We have made the decision, after thoughtfully weighing the results of your cost – benefit analysis, to honestly say "no." Well, then lets go ahead and say it clearly and self-assuredly...in the mirror. Look in own eyes and do it. Just say "No". Say it like we really mean it, and then say it again as we would to the person who made the request. When we pretend, we are speaking to the person who made the request, does it come out differently? Practice and experiment with different ways to say "No" until we find one we are comfortable with. Then go ahead, and say "No" to the concerned person.
- After we say "No" – Be ready for surprises  
If we are used to giving in to others, then after all that practice, we may just be surprised to find that they are not willing to accept it. They may push, rephrase the question, or make a new, not altogether different, request. We must be prepared for it and ready for tackling all kind of tricky situations. Revisit the questions we asked ourselves before – what would happen if we said "No" or "Yes"? If we are serious about saying "No" then stick to it. Politely tell the person making the request that we would appreciate it if they respect our wishes and ask them to refrain from pursuing it further. If we are comfortable expressing "reasons why" then we can do so by speaking from personal perspective.

**Useful Tips – How To Say "No"**

1. Angry No  
Saying "No" in an aggressive manner could result in contempt. It can permanently hamper relationship and future opportunities as well.
2. Soft No  
This is at the other end of the spectrum in how to say "No". Saying "No" in non-confident manner will make it difficult to convince other person about our decision and give different explanations.
3. Assertive No  
This is the best way to say "No" in a firm, yet polite voice. Also, if we want to say the reasons why, keep it short and sweet:
4. Use Body Language Effectively  
When saying "no," stand tall and have contact with another person. Use of firm tone in voice can have an additional impact.

# Just Say No



5. Have Back-up  
When someone asks a question, we are not expected to respond immediately and can seek time. Such time gap provides an opportunity to think the matter and gather our thoughts.

**Important Exercise for Next 1 Month – Practice to Say "No"**

Whether it is a child at home, a salesman in the shop or an assistant in the office – practice saying "No" to one person for at least the next one month. If done regularly, we shall be an expert by end of the month. The more confidently we say "No", the easier it becomes.

What will happen?

1. We shall feel much more confident and proud.
2. We will not find ourselves doing things we never wanted to do.
3. We shall have more time to focus on the things we want to be involved in.
4. Others will respect our wishes and take us seriously the first time we say "No".

Learning to say no to more requests can be one of the biggest favors we can do ourselves and those whom we love. It also helps reduce stress levels and gives us time for what is really important.

Mahatma Gandhi has rightly said – "When you are aware that you are standing for truth, it really does not matter who is standing against you." Let us be true to ourselves and firmly avoid becoming poor victim by saying "No" to unjust unjustified demands from others.



*"We all need a daily check up from the neck up to avoid stinkin 'thinkin' which ultimately leads to hardening of the attitudes." - Zig Ziglar*