

How to say 'yes' to less, to reduce your stress

by Marilyn Sherman www.MarilynSherman.com

Are you the type of person who ends up doing extra work because you have difficulty saying no? You're not alone. Most people today are already overwhelmed with projects, assignments, tasks, deadlines, and responsibilities. So you would think it would be easy to say no to extra work - you know, these small favors or little requests that people have. Usually, these extras come right after someone enters your office saying, 'Hey do you got a minute?' Or 'Could you do me a favor? It's not much...'. Usually these favors, tasks, and special projects have nothing to do with your job and will not move you closer to your mission or your vision statement. I am not talking about your boss choosing you for a special assignment (that's a different subject). I am talking about those things that you say 'yes' to and later regret - with a sense that you got 'roped into' something. These are the things that take up valuable time and increase your stress and resentment toward the person who is doing the requesting. Before you say 'yes' to one more request, there are three things you must do:

1. **Ask clarifying questions.** Before answering either yes or no, practice saying 'it depends' first. This way, you can gather more facts to see if this is something you really want to commit to. Try using one of these questions to get more clarity before answering:
 - a. It depends, what's up?
 - b. It depends, what's the scope of this project?
 - c. It depends, what exactly do you need me to do?
 - d. It depends, when does it need to be done?

Once you have a clear sense of what is being asked of you in terms of size and scope of the job, including project timelines, then let them know you can't give them an answer yet; you have to check out your schedule.

You can say, 'before I give you an answer, let me consult my (calendar, to-do list, my staff, assistant, partner)". Or you can try: "Wow, you caught me off-guard. Let me get back to you. When do you need an answer?" Once you have bought yourself some time, move on to 'must number two'.

- 2. Consult your other priorities.** Over commitment at any level of your organization can be disastrous, not only for the people relying on you, but for yourself. When you say yes before checking out what else is on your plate, you are asking for unneeded stress. That stress carries over to your other responsibilities and creeps into your personal life. Soon you will feel overwhelmed and won't perform your regular duties as effectively. Therefore, consult your priority list by looking at what your existing commitments, timelines, and daily, weekly, or monthly plans are. Once you see what you have already committed to, you can weigh your options. Ask yourself 'If I said yes, would it interfere in any way with what I have going on?' "If I took on this task, would it cause undue stress and overwhelm?" "Do I really want to take on this task at this time?" If after answering these questions honestly, you realize that you just don't want to do it, **don't hesitate another minute.** Give them an answer. If you need to, call a supportive friend first and run the situation by them. Let them know your gut wants to say no, but you are feeling guilty and tempted to say yes. Then, practice saying no with them to get your confidence up. If they are a true friend, they will remind you of your vision and your goals and will encourage you to set your boundaries. Gather your courage and move on to step three.
- 3. Tell them thanks but no thanks.** Maintaining harmonious work relationships is important. So, you don't want to flat out say no. This may cause people to see you as being too independent and earn

you the reputation of not being a team player. However, you can say no and gain respect as someone who knows his or her boundaries. This is very helpful in weeding out all those people who pegged you for the go-to person for everything that they just didn't feel like doing themselves. Depending on how big the favor is, you can turn them down by thanking them first. Let them know you appreciate their confidence in you and thank them for thinking of you or even mention that you are flattered they thought you could take on such a task. However, and this the is the hard part for most people, **tell them no**. Using non-threatening body language and even tone of voice, simply turn them down. Here are some examples:

- a. "Thanks. I wish I could, but I can't".
- b. "I'm flattered you asked me. However, I have a commitment that is tying up all my extra time until next month."
- c. "Gosh, I am all tied up with another project. I can't take on anything else now."
- d. "I would love to help, but I am in the middle of a deadline and can't do it."

4. Learn through practice.

As you can see, I don't believe in over apologizing for not being able to do someone a favor. I also don't believe in over apologizing for being able to decipher what is truly a priority to you. I know this is not going to be easy, and I am definitely suggesting that you need to get out of your comfort zone on this one. But, when you honor your boundaries, it will alleviate the stress that comes later. It is uncomfortable to say no to other people who have come to you for your time, energy, or expertise. However, it is time to get honest with people. If you really do not want to do something, do not take it on now and resent it later. Do not say yes because you are afraid they will judge you if you say no.

In fact, you may actually come across as more organized, efficient, and responsible than if you had said 'yes' and did not have your heart in it.

I recently had a chance to practice these must-do's myself. I was asked to chair a committee putting on an event after the chairperson had to drop out. Before I answered, I asked clarifying questions. "What exactly does this entail? What would I need to do by when?" My questions were specific, but the answers were vague. "Most of the work has been done. There is really not much left for you to do. So, let me know by the end of the day." After contemplating for an hour, I simply called back and said, "Thank you for the opportunity'. However, I am not able to commit. I will, however, be available on-site during the event, but cannot take on the chair position now." The person appreciated that I got back to them so quickly so someone else could be found to do the job.

It's not easy saying 'no' but it does get easier the more you practice. People will start to appreciate and respect your boundaries. You will have less resentment against others for 'roping you into' something that you really didn't have your heart in. Good luck. Soon, you will be reaping the benefits of knowing your boundaries and practicing the art of saying yes to less!

*Marilyn Sherman, author and speaker,
trains people to be more productive and achieve
better results. She can be reached at 1-800-323-6287. For a free preview video to
make your day, click on 'demo' at www.MarilynSherman.com.*