

Lawyers ASSISTANCE

By Dr. Angela White-Bazile, Esq.

RESPECTFULLY . . . “NO”

All aboard! Last call! We are headed to a land far away. Our next stop is wherever you find peace, quiet, sweatless victories, where technology does not work and is not required, no one knows your name, and no one wants anything from you. You will be able to do whatever your heart desires and experience pure joy and fulfillment both personally and professionally.

Would you purchase a ticket if you saw such a trip advertised?

Have you ever wanted to run away, even for a brief moment? Have you ever felt you would lose it if one more person asked you for something or needed your attention? Are you exhausted and need a break from a rigorous work schedule? Are you fearful of taking a vacation and what life may look like if you paused? Does your schedule not permit time to enjoy yourself and/or your loved ones?

Take a deep breath and know that you are not alone, and you are not selfish. Perhaps, you are not as selfish as you should be. You must reflect and understand why “no” might be the best decision for you at this time. Take some time to learn about yourself and find your inner power to discover more joy, peace of mind and heart because internal awareness is crucial for your health and wellbeing.¹

Have you ever received a request personally or professionally and internally said “no,” but externally said “yes” and immediately regretted it? How do you tell your supervisor or fellow partner when they are inconveniencing you? How do you get your colleagues to respect your personal time away from the office and outside of regular work hours? Do you feel your supervisor or anyone, for that matter, is taking advantage of you? Some people may not realize that they have crossed a line.

Do you dread to see that “special” person’s name appear when the phone rings or at the top of emails? Your supervisor, colleagues, family members and friends being able to depend on you is a positive attribute, but are there times when you want to

be left alone? Do you wish you had time when no one required anything of you and your phone did not ring or ping? When does everything become too much to bear, and you want to disappear?

If you are tired of people assuming what you do with your time, you must speak up. Learn to say “no” or at least stop immediately saying “yes” to your detriment. Next time, pause before you respond.

Think back to when you were a child. Do you remember when you asked your parents for something and they told you, “no?” Do you remember how you felt hearing “no” back then? What about now? How do you feel or react when someone tells you “no?” This two-letter word can knock you off your feet if you expect a “yes.”

Saying “no” can be uncomfortable, which may be why some hesitate to say it.² “No” may also be interpreted as impolite or inconsiderate.³ Generally, we feel obligated to go along with things we honestly do not want to do because we do not want to hurt someone’s feelings or make them angry at us.⁴ We want to preserve relationships; we feel indebted to them; and we do not want to disappoint. We should not make others a priority and disregard our feelings and needs as this may lead to resentment, negatively impacting the relationship.⁵

As a high achiever, you are likely used to saying “yes.” “Yes” to additional work to help your team. “Yes” to the promotion with higher pay. “Yes” to working late nights, weekends, holidays and during family time. “Yes” to joining another board/committee without pay. “Yes” to the third happy hour networking event this week.⁶ “Yes” to going the extra mile for a good cause.

While constantly saying “yes” gives the impression that you are agreeable and collaborative and makes the requesting party happy, keep in mind that when you say “yes” to others, you are saying “no” to yourself. Recognize that if you say “yes” to everything that comes across your desk,

you are likely taking on too much responsibility and not being as effective in your primary role. When you already have a great deal on your plate but agree to keep piling on more, you become overwhelmed, leading to mediocre performance or a mental and physical health breakdown.⁷

Recognize that saying “no” does not indicate your inability to accomplish a particular task or make you look incompetent.⁸ Saying “no” creates boundaries, reduces stress, avoids unnecessary conflict, and helps with time management.⁹ Therefore, saying “no” can protect your mental, emotional and physical health.

We all have various roles in our personal and professional lives that can challenge our abilities to set healthy boundaries. As much as you want to please others, your needs are important, and your decisions directly affect your time and energy.

To create boundaries, consider your values and the goals you have for yourself. For a better work-life balance, start saying “no” to a meeting after regular work hours and on weekends and do not reply to emails after a specific time. When you say “no” to particular demands, you allow yourself time, energy and freedom for something you prefer or what will make you happy, such as more sleep, going to the gym, an evening of Netflix or time with loved ones.¹⁰ Saying “no” is an act of self-care because you decide how you spend your leisure time.¹¹ Stop allowing others to dictate your plans and actions.

The takeaway is that your feelings, needs and limits matter because you are the most important person in your life. How can you take care of others if you are not taking care of yourself mentally, emotionally and physically? Start setting healthy boundaries to help you have the physical and emotional reserve to continue caring for others without losing yourself.¹²

The next time you are unsure about how to respond to a request, ask yourself these questions:

1. Will saying “yes” prevent me from

focusing on something more important?

2. Does this potential project, opportunity or activity align with my values, beliefs and goals?

3. Will saying “yes” make me even more tired or burned out?

4. Will saying “yes” be good for my mental health, or will it worsen my symptoms?

5. In the past, when have I said “yes” and then regretted it?

6. When am I more likely to accept a request I would rather decline?¹³

If you struggle to say “no,” other suggestions include:

“I cannot give you an answer right away. Can I get back to you, please?”

“I’m flattered you considered me, but unfortunately, I’ll have to pass this time. Keep up the good work.”

“Thanks for the opportunity, but I don’t have the capacity to take it on right now. However, I think this is a great cause.”

“I would love to help; I really appreciate you including me, but sadly I have a conflict of schedule that makes this task impossible.”

Psychology Today describes the above examples as the “sandwich method” — expressing something positive, followed by the “no,” and ending your reply with something supportive or positive.¹⁴

Remember, saying “no” to others means saying “yes” to yourself. Protect your well-being and normalize saying “no” without needing to over-explain yourself. You should no longer feel uncomfortable, inconsiderate or fear that you will be rejected socially if you choose to say “no” and set healthy boundaries. By doing such, you are creating more mental health stability, building your self-esteem and confidence, and empowering yourself to embrace the best you that can exist.¹⁵

To learn more or seek confidential, non-disciplinary help with alcoholism, drug addiction, depression, burnout or other impairments that pose serious health and ethical issues, contact the professional clinical staff at JLAP at (985)778-0571, email jlapp@louisianajlap.com, or visit the website at www.louisianajlap.com. JLAP is a confidential safe haven of healing.

FOOTNOTES

1. Keisha Moore, “The Power of Saying No,” *Psychology Today* (Nov. 2, 2021), <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/mind-matters-messenger/202111/the-power-saying-no>.

2. Team Tony, “You Have the Right To Say ‘No,’” *The Tony Robbins Blog* <https://www.tonyrobbins.com/mind-meaning/the-power-of-no/>; Margarita

Tartakovsky, “How and When to Say No,” *Psych Central* (June 13, 2021), <https://psychcentral.com/lib/learning-to-say-no>.

3. Moore, *supra* note 1.

4. *Id.*

5. Team Tony, *supra* note 2; Pamela Mendelsohn, “The Importance of Saying ‘No,’” *myTherapyNYC*, <https://mytherapynyc.com/importance-of-saying-no/>.

6. Forbes, Coaches Council, “15 Times It’s OK To Say ‘No’ At Work,” *Forbes* (June 2, 2020), <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbescoachescouncil/2020/06/02/15-times-its-ok-to-say-no-at-work/?sh=2dde0e9e3977>.

7. *Id.*

8. Tartakovsky, *supra* note 2.

9. Moore, *supra* note 1; FCS, “When to say ‘no,’” FCS, Inc. (Feb. 24, 2020), <https://www.fcspysy.com/2020/02/when-to-say-no/>.

10. Moore, *supra* note 1; Mendelsohn, *supra* note 5.

11. Team Tony, *supra* note 2.

12. Mendelsohn, *supra* note 5.

13. Tartakovsky, *supra* note 2.

14. Moore, *supra* note 1.

15. *Id.*

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