

Getting to "No!"

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"If we don't change direction soon, we'll end up where we're going." - Professor Irwin Corey

A lot has been written about how to get to "Yes!" such as guides to achieving compromise, negotiating, creating win/win outcomes, etc. This article is about how to get to "No!"

From a very early age, we are subjected to conditioning that says in order to be "good" we must always do what others want us to do and say "yes" to multiple demands. As adults, this puts us in a very challenging place, since it is impossible to please everyone all of the time.

Indeed, most of us are so overwhelmed just trying to do what others ask of us that it's difficult to fulfill our own needs and wants. Whether we are aware of it or not, this programming affects our productivity. We are left wanting and trying to do everything: please our bosses, our colleagues, our direct reports, all while being responsible parents, devoted spouses, and good children. Oh, if only we could! But we truly can't.

Pause to let this sink in. We truly can't. We have endless to-do lists and a finite number of hours in each day. There will always be more to do than hours available. You will never, ever get it **ALL** done.

Most of us are tied up 21-23 hours a day between sleeping, eating, working, commuting, grooming, cleaning, errands, etc. That leaves one hour. SIXTY MINUTES! One hour to: workout, play with our children, romance our spouse, walk the dog, meditate, read, learn a foreign language, play an instrument, paint a masterpiece, fix the broken widget, and of course watch Oprah.

Pretty depressing, huh? Go ahead, grab some tissue and have yourself a good cry.

One of the most challenging things to change in life is the compulsion to say "yes." However, doing what you love (what is meaningful) requires you to start saying "no." Saying "no" to things like: people asking if they can talk to you for "two minutes", BlackBerry/PDA rings, e-mail on evenings and weekends, phone calls during dinner with family, etc.

You're probably thinking that it's your job to be available; you don't want to be perceived as a "loner"; you need to be a "team player", etc, etc. That's your unconscious belief system talking.

The reality is, people are usually fine with receiving a voice mail, as long as they hear back within 8 business hours. Drive-by interruptions will respect your time more if you kindly respond with, "No problem. Send me an e-mail and I'll get back to you after 3 pm." Your friends and co-workers will understand and respect that you value your family time. And if they don't, why would you want to please someone that doesn't care about you and your family's highest good?

To be clear, I'm not advocating rigidity. I am saying that it takes practice and love to create the boundaries that allow for causing and generating positive change. Love? Yup, good ole' fashion Love.

L-O-V-E. Amore. The truth is, saying "no" is really saying "yes" to the things that are meaningful to you.

STRATEGIES FOR GETTING TO "NO!"

If you only had 12 months to live, and you didn't want to quit your job; what would you make a priority? Nobody ever said on their death-bed, "Jeez, if only I could answer more e-mails before I go." Get Clear on your Meaningful Objectives.

1. **Be "Selfish" with Your Time.** I put that in quotation marks because by being "selfish" you actually can be generous with those things that are a priority.
2. **Communicate Your Intention to Your Co-workers** to increase productivity by being more aware of interruptions and ask for their support. Ever been to a dog training class? If yes, then you know that the one getting "trained" is the owner. Why? Because the dog responds to the owner's behavior. So does everyone else in your life. You constantly train others on how to relate to you.
3. **Eliminate Temptations.** Get rid of the candy jar on your desk. Turn off the blinking envelope that appears with new e-mail. Set IM on "Invisible" or "Busy."
4. **Practice, Practice, Practice.** You've been running your conditioning for decades. Give yourself a break and know that it may feel weird and uncomfortable to create the change. But keep going and pretty soon you'll feel lighter and more balanced.