

# Saying “No” – A Diplomatic Skill to Learn

You are capable, responsible and trustworthy – without a doubt. As a result, peers and professionals alike probably approach you to take on new challenges and tasks. Interested in being on the wellness committee or part of a new task force? Chances are that you are in demand!

This might feel good initially. Yet, flattering as it is, there’s danger in taking on more responsibility than you can handle. Overcommitment can lead to stress and burnout, not to mention the fact that you won’t be able to do quality work when you’re just plain *doing* too much. So, learning to say “no” is a necessary survival skill to cultivate! Here’s how you can become one of those healthy naysayers...

## It’s Not Always Easy

How we respond to requests is often a learned behavior influenced by family, cultural background, friends, acquaintances, and role models, not to mention societal expectations. If you’re a person who finds it hard to say no, perhaps it’s because you are sensitive to the other person’s reaction or you know how it feels when someone says “no” to you. With practice and self-assurance, the word “no” will cease to be an emotional event, and become a natural, appropriate life skill.

## Explain It, Don’t Excuse It

There are times when an explanation is necessary and should be offered. Your advisor has a right to know why you are declining a particular request, for instance. Yet, explanations are different from excuses. With an explanation, you can matter-of-factly tell others why you need to decline their request. However, an excuse often makes you seem wishy-washy.

So, don’t go too heavy on the excuses or become overly apologetic when you’ve decided to say no since you will undermine your credibility and risk offending the person making the request. When you have reached a decision to turn down a request, be sure to say it with conviction and firmness.

## Practice This...

- “No, I won’t be able to fit that in my schedule.”
- “No, I can’t do it yet I have some ideas about other great candidates!”
- “No, I need to keep things balanced right now and I can’t take on another responsibility without my others ones suffering.”

## Just Say No to Guilt & Ego Trips

Many of us have allowed ourselves to be forced into unwanted positions or tasks due to an unhealthy sense of guilt. Learning to say no involves learning not to feel badly when you need to turn down a request. If you have honestly weighed the pros and cons and made a decision based on the merits, you can put any second thoughts out of your mind.

In addition, while you may enjoy the idea that you are the very best person to do something, don’t be persuaded to accept the added responsibility based on these grounds alone. You are unique, but others can also rise to the occasion. Watch out for subtle ego trips, which can make it difficult to delegate responsibility or turn down requests.

If you’re saying yes all the time for the wrong reasons—because you want to be liked, because your ego enjoys the stroking or because you’re afraid to let people down—you’re doing more harm than good. You can say no without destroying relationships and your reputation. Really.

