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"Quotes"

"'No' is an entire sentence in itself."
~Amitabh Bachchan

"I try to be as clear as I can be."
~Demian Bichir

"I've learned that you have to make careful choices because everything has an impact. I've also learned that you can't please everyone in life, so please yourself and figure out what really matters."
~Gretchen Bleiler

"I've had to learn how to say 'no' to offers."
~Jessica Chastain

"Learn to say 'no' in situations where saying 'no' can be difficult[.]"
~Samuel Dash

"We have to not be afraid to say 'no'."
~Cathy Engelbert

"I learned the power of 'no.' 'No' is really important."
~Tony Fadell

"All the mistakes I ever made were when I wanted to say 'No' and said 'Yes'."



Oh No, She Didn't!

Overall, I'd say that I try to live an unruffled life.

Okay, I do have some pet peeves; just ask my family. But, aside from those (and they're all fairly benign), I'm pretty low-key. Honestly, I am. I try not to make more of things than is necessary. My general approach is to look beyond the surface...to try to see the heart rather than simply respond to the action or tone.

Sounds good, right? Then, why did I catch major 'tude when a colleague's response to a recent email request of mine came back with a simple "No"? There was no, "Hi June, Got your request and" That would have been nice. But, instead the reply was one-word and curt: "No".

Seriously? Oh no, she didn't!

But, I caught myself (as I'm trying to do again as I relive this situation with you). What was prompting the instinctive, in-the-moment, downward spiral into which I was descending?

It finally hit me. In this instance, my trigger wasn't so much that I got a "no". Clearly, for the sake of developing and maintaining healthy boundaries, we all must be willing to decline some requests. The real challenge here was the way that "no" was delivered. Sometimes the manner of the message is enough to irk even the most peace-loving among us!

So, join me for this edition of **EA Insights**. Let's explore the art of "no".

With hope, when you're done, your next response -- whether an "I accept" or "I decline" -- won't leave folks fuming!

All the best,

June

June Melvin Mickens
Executive Advantage, LLC

The Art of "No"

June Melvin Mickens
Executive Advantage, LLC

"N-O"

Can you think of two letters that carry more weight?



Use them harshly, and they sever relationships, crush dreams, or stop progress. Use them too sparingly, and they lead to a whole range of excesses...too much _____. (You fill in the blank.)

"No" is such a pivotal word. Yet, we seldom think about how we use it. So, let me share a few thoughts on declining effectively.

Base your "no" on a solid foundation.

In other words, say "no" for a reason. Understand what's behind your decision to reject that offer or decline that invitation. When you don't know *internally* why you're taking a certain position, there's a greater likelihood that you will convey your oral or written answer *externally* in an ineffective manner.

Give a clear answer.

If you leave folks wondering whether you just gave a "yea" or a "nay", then something got lost in the translation. To decline effectively, make sure you're providing an answer that clearly delivers the intended message.

Match your tone to the situation.

Is a soft touch the best response in a given setting? Is the person on the other end one who tends not to pick up on nuances and subtleties well, making a strong approach from you the only way to go? Is this a "Wow, wish I could..." moment, or is an "Absolutely not!" in order? The point to remember is that every "no" is not created equally. Take stock of the receiver, the environment, the request...and then properly adapt your response to the situation.

Explain and/or apologize...when appropriate.

Some folks are so uncomfortable with opting out that they immediately go into explanation mode, or default to apologizing, whenever a "no" crosses their lips or flows into print. Well, let me unburden you. An explanation or apology is not universally required. (I know; be still, my heart!) At its core, such misplaced verbiage really is an attempt by the decliner to get the requester to agree with his or her "no" decision. But, as highlighted above, if the decision to pass is based on a solid foundation, then the need to sway the receiver diminishes in importance...because you've already convinced YOU!

So, is there a place for apologies or explanations? Yes. You apologize when you would fulfill the request if you could and are genuinely sorry that you can't. The apology doesn't change the answer, but it does let the receiver know where your heart is. Similarly, you explain when you want to pull back the curtain so the other person gets a sense of your reasoning for why, in this instance, you're unable to do as asked. Again, the final answer remains the same; your extra sharing simply is intended to educate the person about your current rationale or to cue him or her in on how to get a different answer in the future.

Stay open to a work-around.

A pass today is not necessarily a blanket and ongoing rejection. You may need to decline the specific request that has come your way. However, while that one thing may not be possible, perhaps something else is. The best responsible might be a "No, but..." that enables you to walk away with a win-win. Again, your original decision to decline the current idea does not change. On the other hand, by altering scope or timing slightly, it might be possible to meet the request's need, and your own, in some way.

Although "Just say 'No'." is a great slogan, it isn't always easy to do. And, it definitely can be a tricky response to navigate for one dedicated to building bridges and maintaining relationships.

Mastering the art of "no" takes practice. The good news is that assistance is available. So, if setting boundaries and declining effectively is a challenge for you, this is one time when a "no" clearly is misplaced. Reach out to us at [Executive Advantage](#). [Contact us today](#). Let us help you develop a healthy use of that little, but ever-so-important, word.

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~Moss Hart

"Once I commit to something, I complete it. If I say 'no,' I mean 'no.' I just have to learn how to say 'no' more."

~Penny Marshall

"Learn to say 'no' to the good so you can say 'yes' to the best."

~John C. Maxwell

"I've gotten myself into some difficult situations because I couldn't say 'no'."

~Melissa McBride

"Unless someone truly has the power to say 'no', they never truly have the power to say 'yes'."

~Dan Millman

"Every time I say 'no' to a small temptation, I strengthen my will to say 'no' to a greater one."

~Mother Angelica

"What we say 'no' to is sometimes more important than what we say 'yes' to."

~Lara Pulver

"Sometimes it's good to say 'no'. Sometimes it's good to not act impulsively."

~Phoebe Robinson

"I don't believe in wasting anybody's time. I like to be honest. I like to be clear."

~Anna Wintour

About Executive Advantage

At [Executive Advantage](#), we are committed to providing results-based business and management consulting, leadership development, and coaching support. We partner with business leaders to build healthy, well-functioning organizations, where goals are met and people thrive. We also partner with individuals to create professional (and personal) lives with clearer direction, improved results, and greater balance.

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