

# *The Art of Saying No*

**By Dr. Travis Bradberry**

John Gailbraith's housekeeper was a whiz when it came to saying no. One day in 1965 the noted economist was taking a nap when President Lyndon Johnson called his home. "He's taking a nap and has left strict orders not to be disturbed," his housekeeper told the President. Johnson replied, "Well, I'm the President. Wake him up." Her response? A simple: "I'm sorry, Mr. President, but I work for Mr. Galbraith, not for you." Then she hung up.

Research from the University of California in San Francisco shows that the more difficulty you have saying no, the more likely you are to experience stress, burnout, and even depression. Saying no is indeed a major challenge for most people. Anyone who suffers from the stress that comes from over commitment can get help themselves by following these simple strategies for saying no.

## **1. Find your yes**

Before you can become good at saying no, you have to know what you're saying yes to when you're saying no. You see every opportunity that you pass with a no is really saying yes to something else – something that you'd prefer to do or something more important to you in the long run. You can't hope to say no when the pressure is on until you know for sure what you really want. When you're feeling pressure to say yes and acquiescence feels easier than taking a stand, just think of your yes. If joining the PTA fundraising committee means spending even *less* time with your children, focusing your attention on this fact will embolden you to say no and keep your priorities straight.

## **2. Sleep on it**

Even if you feel like saying yes (and certainly if you're having doubts), ask for a day to think about it before providing an answer. It's going to be much easier to say no once you've had time to consider all of your commitments and whether the item in question is a realistic

addition to your schedule. This will also give you a chance to come up with the best way to say no.

### **3. Sandwich the no between two yeses**

Sandwiching a no between two yeses ensures that your no will be more palatable. It's also a great way to explain that to which you are already committed. For example, if your boss asks you to work on the weekend, but you have family commitments you cannot break, explain these commitments to your boss (the first yes), how that prevents you from coming in on the weekend (the no), and finish by confirming your commitment to the company and your work (the final yes) by asking if there are other ways you can contribute that don't require you to come in that weekend.

### **4. Make sure you're actually saying "no"**

Make no mistake about it, no is a powerful word that you should not be afraid to wield. When it's time to say no, you need to avoid phrases like "I don't think I can" or "I'm not certain." Using limp phrases instead of saying no will often be considered a yes. When it's time to say no, just say no!

### **5. Be prepared to repeat yourself**

If you say no and the other party pushes back, the best thing you can do is repeat yourself. This is much easier to do when you recognize beforehand that it is often necessary. In some cases, you may have to repeat yourself more than once. If you offered any explanation with your original response, you can repeat this explanation or just say no again. Don't back yourself into a corner by trying to explain yourself further. It is your right to say no to any request, and you'll often need to be firm in order to have your intentions understood.

### **Putting These Strategies to Work**

Saying no to a new commitment honors your existing commitments and gives you the opportunity to successfully fulfill these commitments. Saying no can certainly open doors; for example, when John Galbraith woke up from his nap, the first thing President Johnson

wanted to know was the identity of the woman who told him no. After he found out Johnson said, “I want her working for me.”

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR:**

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Dr. Travis Bradberry is the award-winning co-author of *Emotional Intelligence 2.0* and the cofounder of TalentSmart, the world’s leading provider of emotional intelligence tests and training serving more than 75% of Fortune 500 companies. His best-selling books have been translated into 25 languages and are available in more than 150 countries. Dr. Bradberry has written for, or been covered by, *Newsweek*, *BusinessWeek*, *Fortune*, *Forbes*, *Fast Company, Inc.*, *USA Today*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Post*, and *Harvard Business Review*.