

## **/// Learning When To Say No!**

**At what point do you know when to say “no” to something that might be a great opportunity? I ask this because I spent all last semester saying “yes” to many offers, and now my time is essentially full. I am still being offered great opportunities, most of which seem nearly impossible to turn down. I don't want to sound like I am a “yes man”. It’s difficult when there are so many doors that have been opened for me to improve myself and grow, yet I know I can’t walk through them all. Any thoughts? Michael U.**

Michael, I’ve selected your question for our column this quarter because almost all of us have been faced with this question at some point in our careers. We are flooded with projects, requests, and demands for our time and attention. At the point it seems there is no room for even the smallest of new tasks, invariably the phone rings, we run into a colleague in the hall, or the absolute worst, our boss asks us “have you got a moment?” If you are a Can Do, Get Things Done, A+ type personality, people will naturally gravitate towards asking you to help them. People learn quickly who can be depended upon for results and who is “all talk and no action”. Good people ALWAYS wind up with priority/scheduling problems.

Let’s look at some courses of action you can take to resolve this situation. First and foremost, how critical is the request? What is the priority for this new request within your and your boss’s list of priorities? Is this task more important than some of the others on your current list? What is the timeframe of the request? Sometimes lesser items get done ahead of more important tasks simply because they can be accomplished faster and removed from the list freeing up time to do the more critical tasks. This is why learning to prioritize your work load is a critical skill to develop. It’s not just a simple matter of knowing which items are more important; it’s knowing which ones to work on and when! The higher you go in the food chain, the more critical this skill becomes. Many talented and highly competent people have failed simply because they did not prioritize effectively. In order to fully achieve your ultimate goals, you have to think through your priority list and determine exactly where this “new” request falls in the greater scheme of things.

Just saying yes is easy. Saying no is much more difficult for many reasons. A lesson I had to learn the hard way was to ask my boss what he/she wanted me to take off my list or delegate to my subordinates so that I could accept the new task they now required. Simply adding it to an already overloaded schedule did not do me or the organization any good. One thing to help you do this more effectively is to have an already prepared list of priorities so that you can recommend the ones you think should be deleted or delegated. Then they know you have thought this through and are not simply trying to “buck” the assignment.

Many times the things people ask us to do sound really neat and can be considered an honor. This may be the toughest of all situations for you to figure out! I've learned I have to say no to many of the good things that people ask me to do so that I have the time to say yes to the truly great things! So how do I know when something is great as opposed to just good? I ask myself these questions: What am I trying to accomplish in my job and with my life? Do I have long-term strategic goals and objectives, or am I simply “fighting the good fight” every day to simply survive until tomorrow?

Only you can define and determine what is great. If you have a good strategic plan, it is much easier to figure out whether this new task helps you move closer to your objective or if it simply “clogs the path” to getting the things done that help you and your team achieve what is truly important. Do you actively delegate action items to your subordinates to help them develop their critical skills or are you simply “dumping” the things you don’t

want to do? That answer will tell you a lot about your leadership style and how well you are developing a strong team that will one day take over your role so you can go on to bigger and better things!

Learning how to figure out what is the best use of your time and talents will go a long way towards ensuring you go to work each day motivated and excited as opposed to dreading yet another day at the office. Focus on the great things and you and your team will always rise to bigger challenges and greater rewards!

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