

---

## Article: The Importance of Saying No

---

I have delivered over 100 time management courses. At each course I asked delegates what areas of time management they wanted to improve. On every course at least one delegate said "Saying no".

On the face of it, it shouldn't be difficult to say no. One just says "No". However, it's obviously not that simple. If it was, it wouldn't be an issue for all those people.

---

### Why it's not simple to say no

---

Some reasons why it's not simple:-

Most people have been programmed, socially, culturally, by the media, to say 'yes'. In the workplace key attributes are cited as working collaboratively, being a team player. Job descriptions often contain the phrase '*and any other activities that fall within the remit of the job*'. Saying no is often portrayed as being difficult, obstructive, not team playing, and even being destructive or disobedient.

Often people in authority - parents, bosses, and colleagues make it difficult to say no, using a voice tone and non-verbal communication that makes it clear that their request is really an order. People also use manipulative techniques such as buttering up, or 'if you don't agree I'll be in trouble' approaches to stop you saying no.

---

### Why it's important to say no

---

To be effective in work and out of work you have to be able to say no. Saying no protects your own interests and those of other people. You cannot say yes to everything and to be effective you have to have strategies to know what to say no to and how to say it. 'Effective' in that you (1) achieve your important objectives (benefiting yourself, your team, your organisation), (2) you maintain your self-respect, (3) you manage your stress levels, and (4) that you are seen as someone who people find easy to communicate with and trust.

### Saying no – rights and responsibilities

To be able to say no you need to believe that

- you have the right to ask, and the right to refuse
- other people have the right to ask and the right to refuse
- you have the right to be asked in an assertive way and the responsibility to refuse in an assertive way
- other people have the right to be asked in an assertive way and the responsibility to refuse in an assertive way

An 'assertive way' means direct and clear communication, unemotional tone of voice, using assertive non-verbal communication (direct eye contact, open gestures etc.)

---

## When to say no - saying no for the right reasons

---

At the time management courses, I used to say, “It’s saying no for the ‘right reasons’”.

On the basis you know your job best you are in an excellent position to make the decision. So you should decide when to say no and when to say yes. Things do change, other people have information which might influence and impact on your decision, and the effective person is flexible, able to change when and if required. You may also want to say yes because it fits in with longer term objectives and plans.

*Note* – finding out factors that might impact on your priorities and activities is essential to knowing when to say no.

---

## How to say no (and keep your job, self-respect and the respect of others)

---

### Be short, clear and specific

Say ‘No’ or ‘I don’t want ...’, and not ‘can’t’ or ‘possibly’ or ‘perhaps’. For example, ‘I don’t want to undertake anything new right now’ or ‘I’m not able/willing to do that’. Use strong, powerful words and phrases that demonstrate certainty.

Where possible don’t give the reason for your refusal. An example to show why not: - Someone asks you to attend a meeting that you are unable to attend. You can say ‘*I’m not able to attend*’ or you can say ‘*I’m not able to attend because .....*’

Giving a reason is dangerous because

- People will assess the reason and decide whether it’s important enough for your refusal – and may continue to ask you if they don’t consider it is an important enough reason
- It implies some uncertainty about the decision to say no – otherwise why do you feel obliged to give a reason for your decision?

### Make sure there is consistency in all your communication channels - words, tone, and non-verbal communication

We trust congruence in others, and congruence is achieved when there is a consistent message in words, tone and non-verbal communication. Use assertive body language, for example, straight stance, good eye contact. Use a firm voice and strong words.

### Plan in advance

Recognise when you want to say ‘No’. Acknowledge any negative feelings you have at the prospect of saying ‘Yes’. Decide what outcomes you want to achieve; ideal, realistic option and fall-back position. Plan what you are going to say and how you are going to say it.

### Affirm your rights to yourself

*Acknowledge your rights: ‘I have the right to define my own limits, look after my needs, and say ‘No’.*

**Say when you can, not when you can’t**

If there is an activity you are able to, want to, or need to say yes to (for the right reasons of course) you can say 'no, later'. For example, 'I'm not able to do it now, I will be able to do it/assist with it/discuss it this afternoon. I'm available after 1pm.'

### **Explain the implications of saying yes**

If you are being pressurised, you can always state the impact of saying yes. 'If I help with that, I won't be able to attend the meeting/x won't happen'. If the pressure is from a boss, then you might like to say 'I have x to do and you are asking me to do y. The implications of me not doing x is this. Which do you want me to prioritise?'

### **Other strategies to help you say no**

---

#### **Ask for time**

- Recognise when you are genuinely unsure and need time to consider
- Acknowledge to yourself your assertive right: 'I have the right to ask for time to think, before I agree, disagree, or make a decision'
- Be clear and specific, for example, 'I'm not sure. I'd like to think it over. I'll call you on Tuesday at 2 p.m. and let you know'

#### **Understand that you can change your mind**

- Recognise when you really don't want to stay with your original agreement
- Acknowledge to yourself your assertive right: I have the right to reconsider and change my mind

Action your change of mind. For example, 'I know I agreed to start the project in April, but I now realise I'm feeling unduly pressured at the prospect and I'd like to start in May'



---

## About the Author - Krista Powell Edwards

---

Krista is a very experienced and highly qualified consultant, coach, facilitator, trainer and author.

She uses her experience and expertise to support individuals and organisations to enhance their effectiveness and performance.

Krista is currently writing her first book on how to effectively communicate credibility.

---

### ***Expertise and experience***

---

Krista has developed her expertise through

- An extensive track record of supporting organisations in the UK and internationally since 1995.
- Masters level research in the factors that affect the achievement of workplace performance.
- Extensive Continuous Professional Development (CPD), (including regular attendance at conferences and development programmes).
- Research of 'best practice' consultancy, facilitation and learning and development
- Qualifying as a Master Trainer, Master Practitioner and Practitioner in Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP).
- Designing and delivering 500+ training and development programmes.
- 20+ years as Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) volunteer - branch chair, council representative - supporting the CPD and performance of 7500+ HR professionals.
- Lecturing at a university (International Human Resource Management).

---

### ***Specialist areas***

---

Krista specialises in three main areas:-

**Credibility** - How to communicate credibility for influence and positive impact in the workplace

**Credible HR** - Enabling HR to add value to the organisation

**Personal Effectiveness Skills** - Support in developing confidence, credibility, influence, time management and assertiveness and conflict management skills so that individuals and teams are able to perform effectively.

---

### ***Services***

---

Krista offers support in **workplace performance improvement**.

Tailored, cost effective

- Consultancy and Research
- Coaching
- Facilitation
- Training and Development

---

### ***Contact Details***

---



[Krista@theCredibilityExpert.co.uk](mailto:Krista@theCredibilityExpert.co.uk)



**07804 956007**

All rights reserved. No part of this material may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electrical, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without the prior written permission of the copyright holder. This material may not be lent, sold, hired or otherwise disposed of by way of trade in any form without the prior written permission of the copyright holder.

**THIS COPYRIGHT NOTICE MUST NOT BE REMOVED.**

---