

Productivity Principle: The Positive ‘No’

Inspired by the book *Essentialism* by Greg McKeown & the co-founder of the Harvard Program on Negotiation, William Ury

Why do we say ‘Yes’ when we want to say ‘No’?

We forget our purpose

“When we are unclear about our real purpose in life— in other words, when we don’t have a clear sense of our goals, our aspirations, and our values— we make up our own social games.” – Greg McKeown.

Without a clear purpose we’ll default to playing petty social games that provide little meaning to our life.

We fear social awkwardness

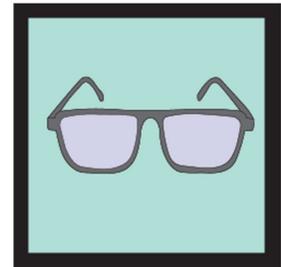
“The fact is, we as humans are wired to want to get along with others. After all, thousands of years ago when we all lived in tribes of hunter gatherers, our survival depended on it. And while conforming to what people in a group expect of us— what psychologists call normative conformity— is no longer a matter of life and death, the desire is still deeply ingrained in us.” – Greg McKeown

How can we develop the courage to say ‘No’?

We need to see ‘No’ in a new and empowering way:

A. When we say ‘No,’ we’re actually saying ‘Yes’ to a life of meaning.

Each external ‘No’ is an inward ‘Yes.’ Those inward ‘Yes’s’ strengthen our commitment to our purpose/priorities, defining who we are and what we stand for.



B. When we say ‘No,’ we’re actually saying ‘No’ to a request, not a person.

“Everyone is selling something— an idea, a viewpoint, an opinion— in exchange for your time. Simply being aware of what is being sold allows us to be more deliberate in deciding whether we want to buy it... we forget that denying the request is not the same as denying the person. Only once we separate the decision from the relationship can we make a clear decision and then separately find the courage and compassion to communicate it.” – Greg McKeown

C. When we say ‘No,’ we’re trading short-term popularity for long-term respect.

“(W)hen the initial annoyance or disappointment or anger wears off, the respect kicks in. When we push back effectively, it shows people that our time is highly valuable. It distinguishes the professional from the amateur... learn to say no firmly, resolutely, and yet gracefully. Because once we do, we find, not only that our fears of disappointing or angering others were exaggerated, but that people actually respect us more... I have found it almost universally true that people respect and admire those with the courage of conviction to say no.” – Greg McKeown

What’s the best way we can say ‘No’ without damaging a relationship?

We need to frame our ‘No’ as a ‘Positive No’:

1. Start with a personal ‘Yes’ by stating a personal priority.
 - “I’m currently working hard to finish ____” OR “I’ve set the ambitious goal of completing ____, within the next ____.”
2. Continue by stating the conflict with our personal priority.
 - “Because of that, I need to say no to all requests at this time.” OR “For that reason, I need to let go of a lot of things and devote my time and attention to doing the best to successful complete ____.”
3. Finish by showing that we still care and offer to help out in a small way.
 - “Here are a few resources that I found to help your ____ succeed.” OR “Although I can’t assist you with this project I can introduce you to someone who can.”

