

Leadership Insights Executive Session Summary

The Ethics and Equity of Saying No™

Session One: Every Yes Has a Price™

Executive Summary

The inaugural session of **The Ethics and Equity of Saying No™** examined one of the most pressing yet underdeveloped competencies in leadership: the ethical practice of saying “no.”

Three executive insights emerged throughout the session:

- Leaders are not struggling because they lack opportunities—they are struggling because they often lack intentional decision-making filters.
- Capacity is an ethical leadership issue, not simply a productivity challenge.
- Sustainable leadership requires courage, discernment, and the willingness to protect what matters most before saying yes.

Leaders described the session as validating, practical, freeing, and immediately applicable. The strongest engagement centered on the **P.A.U.S.E.™ Framework**, **The Four Questions Before Every Yes™**, and the realization that every commitment carries both visible and invisible costs.

Community Conversation: Finding Community Before Content

Before introducing leadership frameworks, leaders intentionally spent time getting to know one another through a series of lighthearted community-building questions. Although the questions were simple, they revealed meaningful insights into how leaders recharge, remain curious, continue learning, and care for themselves outside of work.

Coffee, Tea & Daily Rituals

Leaders enthusiastically discussed their preferred beverages, including coffee, tea, matcha, espresso, and combinations of both. Several humorously refused to choose between coffee and tea, illustrating that leaders often appreciate flexibility rather than rigid choices. The conversation highlighted how small daily rituals often become moments of pause in otherwise demanding schedules.

Leadership Insight: Intentional rituals create opportunities for reflection, helping leaders respond thoughtfully rather than react automatically.

Ice Cream or Chocolate?

One of the most spirited discussions centered on a playful question. Responses ranged from vanilla and rum raisin to chocolate ice cream, with many leaders insisting they preferred “both.”

While humorous, the discussion reinforced a broader leadership lesson.

Leaders frequently assume difficult decisions require choosing one extreme over another. Sometimes thoughtful leadership involves discovering creative alternatives that honor multiple priorities.

Books, Podcasts & Lifelong Learning

Leaders demonstrated an impressive commitment to lifelong learning

Resources mentioned included:

- *Bible in a Year* as a daily grounding practice

- *Diary of a CEO*
- *The Chronicles of Narnia*
- mystery novels

- immersive reading experiences
- leadership and personal development resources

Leadership Insight

The strongest leaders intentionally remain students.

Television & Entertainment

Leaders also shared favorite television programs they enjoy as a way to relax and disconnect.

Popular responses included:

- *Star Trek*
- *Law & Order*
- *Chicago Med*
- *Chicago Fire*
- *Chicago P.D.*

The conversation reinforced that recreation plays an important role in sustaining long-term leadership effectiveness.

Arts, Museums & Creativity

Leaders expressed appreciation for art galleries, museums, and creative spaces that inspire curiosity and fresh thinking.

Poll Results & Leadership Priorities

Leaders identified the areas where saying yes too often has the greatest impact.

The strongest themes included: Time | Focus | Well-being | Energy

Many leaders recognized that these resources—not ability—were being depleted by excessive commitments. Relationships appeared less frequently.

Participant Insights

Throughout the discussion, several consistent themes emerged. Leaders reflected on wishing they had declined:

- projects
- clients
- volunteer opportunities
- events
- hiring decisions
- relationships lacking mission alignment
- commitments accepted out of guilt or obligation

Many acknowledged becoming increasingly intentional about protecting both their mission and their capacity. Experienced leaders also expressed a desire to mentor younger professionals in developing healthy boundaries much earlier in their careers.

Frameworks That Resonated

P.A.U.S.E.™: Leaders appreciated having language that normalizes slowing down before responding. Several noted they intended to begin saying: “I need some pause time to think.” before making significant commitments.

Four Questions Before Every Yes™: Leaders repeatedly described these screening questions as practical, memorable, and immediately applicable. Many commented that these questions fill an important gap because leaders are often told to say no but rarely taught how to evaluate a yes.

Featured Courageous Leadership Conversation™

The featured conversation reinforced that courageous leadership often requires disappointing expectations to remain aligned with purpose. Leaders described the discussion as: validating | freeing

| authentic | encouraging | energizing The conversation emphasized confidence, resilience, discernment, and surrounding oneself with supportive community.

Voices from the Community

Throughout the workshop, leaders shared comments that captured both the emotional and practical impact of the session. While presented anonymously, these reflections represent the collective voice of the community.

Capacity: “I wish I had said no sooner.” | “I’ve learned the ethics of declining work I shouldn’t accept.” | “I need pause time to think.”

Mission: “I’m trying to become a better steward of my time and gifts.” | “I no longer work with people who aren’t aligned with my values.” | “Mission matters more than obligation.”

Courage: “This conversation is validating.” | “This is exactly what I needed.” | “I’ve felt liberated since learning to say no.”

Practical Application “I love these screening questions.” | “This framework is incredibly helpful.” | “The questions and the P.A.U.S.E.™ framework changed my thinking.”

Hope “I want to teach younger leaders this much earlier.” | “This conversation is necessary.” | “This came at exactly the right time.”

Participant Commitments

Leaders committed to:

- Practicing intentional pause.
- Applying the Four Questions Before Every Yes™.
- Completing regular Yes Audits™.
- Using The Cost of Every Yes™ Executive Decision Matrix.
- Protecting time, focus, energy, and well-being.
- Modeling healthy boundaries.
- Mentoring others in ethical leadership practices.

Recommendations

Individual Leaders

- Build intentional pause into decision-making.
- Evaluate opportunities through mission, capacity, and well-being.
- Normalize asking for time before responding.
- Conduct quarterly Yes Audits™.
- Prioritize quality commitments over quantity.

Managers & Executives

- Reward thoughtful decision-making rather than constant availability.
- Create environments where discussing workload is encouraged.
- Model healthy boundaries.
- Integrate capacity discussions into coaching conversations.

Organizations

- Examine whether organizational norms unintentionally reward burnout.
- Incorporate ethical boundary-setting into leadership development.
- Equip leaders with practical decision-making frameworks.
- Recognize capacity management as a strategic leadership competency.

Future Professional Development

Leaders expressed strong interest in continued learning related to:

- ethical leadership
- executive coaching
- courageous conversations
- accountability

- mentorship
- boundary setting
- sustainable leadership

Additional Resources

Leadership Frameworks

- P.A.U.S.E.™
- Four Questions Before Every Yes™
- The Cost of Every Yes™ Executive Decision Matrix
- Leadership Toolkit
- Yes Audit™

Featured Courageous Leadership Conversation™

Perfect Pitch Group

- Website: <https://www.perfectpitchgroup.com>

Featured Book

- *40 Year Plus Glow Up Playbook*

Additional Reading = Mariama S. Boney – Forbes Coaches Council

<https://www.forbes.com/councils/forbescoachescouncil/people/mariamaboney/>

Leadership Insight of the Month™

- The strongest leaders are not those who accept every opportunity. They are the leaders who intentionally evaluate every opportunity through the lens of purpose, capacity, values, and long-term impact.
 - Leadership is measured by the wisdom behind every **yes** and every **no**.
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