

HOW TO SAY NO

AND LOOK
PROFESSIONAL



WHY "NO" IS SUCH AN IMPORTANT WORD...

Close your eyes and think for a moment: when was the last time you did agree to something when, deep inside, you wanted to refuse? I have done it...we all have, either because the request caught us by surprise, because we were too shy to say no or simply because we wanted to be pleasant.

It is great to want to accommodate and be helpful to others. The problem, however, arises when we do it by agreeing to things that please everyone but ourselves or when we commit to tasks for which we have no time, energy or desire.

Most people don't like to say NO but saying NO is a must to preserve your boundaries. Boundaries give leaders the space to focus on what is truly important - how many leaders have you seen agreeing to everything? In addition, in a time where pressure at the workplace increases day by day, and burnouts are becoming a frequent occurrence, healthy boundaries will make your career sustainable and will help you achieve a balanced life. It might be a challenge at the beginning but it is a skill that can be learnt and improves

I have written this short guide to help you get started in your journey to an assertive and balanced life. I have included the techniques and principles that I find most helpful based on my 20 years teaching assertiveness to my teams, mentees and clients. It is by far not all - assertiveness is a vast topic - but I believe it is enough to start practicing until you feel comfortable setting and protecting your boundaries. If you need more help, you can always join one of our Mentor Groups. Just reach out to get more information.

So ladies, what are you waiting for? Start exercising your assertiveness muscle! Set your boundaries and learn to say NO in a constructive way and with a smile. The results are surprising...

Enjoy the journey!

Arantza



1

Remember your rights

You are not only able but you are also entitled to have a voice and set boundaries

Saying NO is hard for most of us. If you feel shy or you are not used to define clear limits, start by reading the points below every day until they feel natural to you.



MY RIGHTS

- I have the right to make decisions and be responsible for their consequences.
- I have the right to NOT justify or explain my decisions.
- I have the right to express disagreement or disapproval.
- I have the right to disregard other people's preferences or to work out a compromise that include my own ones.
- I have the right to change my mind.
- I have the right to say "I don't know..."
- I have the right to right a "wrong".
- I have the right to make mistakes and be responsible for them.
- I have the right to ask and make requests.
- I have the right to say "I don't understand..."

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Be aware of your own needs and limits

You cannot respect your needs if you don't know them

Have you ever accepted doing some task that felt right initially and you started feeling irritated or annoyed about it by it, only days later? That happens when you are not fully aware of your own needs and desires in general, or at least at the time you were asked. It is critical to invest time to identify what is of essence to you so that you are able to define clear boundaries and be prepared. I am giving you some tips to achieve that.



The best way to learn and improve very fast is to look at your own behaviour: what are you doing well? what are your challenges when it comes to set boundaries T

ASSERTIVENESS IS ABOUT RESPONDING INSTEAD OF REACTING

Here is a simple trick: in the coming days, take a few minutes by the end of each day during the coming days to review any situation where you have agreed to ,or negotiated something ,even a trivial thing; the times that you have requested, or not dared to request something.

For each of them, ask yourself the following questions and write down the answers on a small notebook:

- Am I happy with the situation?
- Did I feel I owned my decision?
- What did I do well to respect my own needs?
- What could have I done better?
- Was the outcome positive for both parties?

You will see your own pattern and learn where and how to improve very quickly!

Take a notebook and write down:

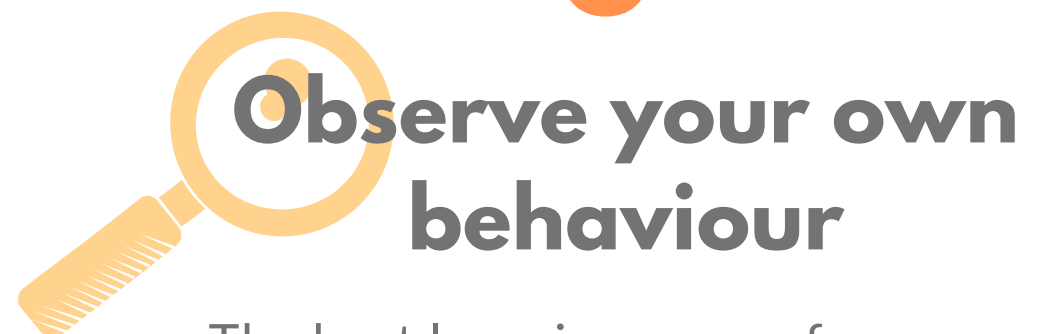
1) What is **what you want to achieve** in your professional life? What about your private life? It can be better health, more fun, a career objective...Write whatever you feel. It will give you a direction and set the tone. You can repeat the entire exercise anytime you need it.

2) **How can you get there?** Do you need a better health? More rest? More sports? More education? More coaching? More time with your family? Try to make it precise and quantify it(e.g. meeting you boss half hour every week, sleeping 8 hours/day...) That will help you focus on what is important for you define your boundaries around that.

3) **What are you doing right now that is not in line** with your wants or needs? Those are your QUICK WINS , things to which you want to say NO already.

Please note that this is a high level approach. You can learn and practice the full methodology in the "The Corporate Goddess Essentials Program" (more info at www.thecorporategoddess.com)

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The best learning comes from your own experience



4

Be present

Take a deep breath, listen and detect your emotions

When somebody makes a request to you, take a deep breath before replying. This will help you to relax, bring oxygen to your brain and will make you more present during the conversation.

By being present ,you are more aware. You improve your communication, and give yourself the chance to ask all the questions you need to make your decision and give a professional answer.

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Buy yourself time

No need to always give an answer right away.

If you are not sure of your decision, BUY YOURSELF SOME TIME before you jump into a conclusion you might regret later.



IT IS POSSIBLE IN MOST CASES, NOT TO GIVE AN IMMEDIATE ANSWER TO A REQUEST.

YOU WILL REMAIN PROFESIONAL IF YOU SAY:

- I NEED TO CHECK MY CALENDAR; I'LL GET BACK TO YOU.
- I'VE GOT TO THINK ABOUT THAT; I'LL LET YOU KNOW.



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I see you and I hear you

Assertiveness is a communication skill.

Assertiveness is a communication skill and an assertive attitude, unlike an aggressive one, will help you protect your own needs as well as respect those of the other party.

Good communication starts by listening. Make sure that, when somebody makes a request to you, you let him/her finish.

When a person is interrupted, she/he might become defensive, which will make more difficult the dialogue.

In addition, it is helpful to acknowledge the person's needs. It shows empathy and confirms your proper understanding of the message.



YOU ARE NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR EMOTIONS OF THE OTHER PERSON. IT IS GOOD ENOUGH TO DO YOUR BEST.

Let's look at an example. Imagine your sister has just decided to visit you from abroad next weekend. It is short notice but you want to take the coming Friday off to be with her and ask your supervisor. Unfortunately, he/she rejects your request because there is a training, you did not know about, planned for your entire team. Here are two potential answers in two different styles.

- **No. We have a team training that day.** Or

- **I understand you want to spend time with your sister but it will not be possible on Friday, I am sorry. We have a training programmed that day and we need to do it all together.**

Which option would you prefer? Most people would go for the second option. Of course, you cannot control how other people communicate but you can control how you do it yourself and have a direct impact on the tone of the conversation. Use a more empathetic tone and our NO will be received much better.

Something important: by communicating in an assertive and empathetic manner, you create the environment to develop constructive relationships and influence the outcome of the discussion. It maximizes your chances but does not guarantee the result or how the other person will react. Not everybody reacts in the same way, and some people have it really hard taking NO for an answer. The key thing is that you don't feel responsible for their emotions. You are doing your best and should give yourself credit for that. It is a learning process.



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The "I" Technique

It is all about your feelings, thoughts and needs
Starting your sentences with "I" opens for discussion without putting the other person immediately on the defensive.

Using "I" as a subject in your sentences is a way to take full ownership of your reaction in a given situation. Saying "*I feel...*", "*I sense...*" "*I'd like...*" or "*I want...*" help to introduce your reply without putting the other person immediately on the defensive.

Take this example : your boss asks you to do some unexpected work last minute, by the end of your workday, and you know it will take you a few hours. You can say :

"I am sorry, I cannot do it this evening, I have an appointment" - and mind you, the appointment can be with yourself! ;) or

"I would like to help you but I am busy tonight. I will do it first thing in the morning." to show you understand the urgency, if this is the case

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KISS (Keep it Simple, Stupid) and Short

There is no need for long explanations or justifications

Here is a powerful tip: there is no need to over explain. Giving too many details or explanations won't help you for 2 reasons:

- 1) The more you say, the more you open the door for the other person to debate your reasons and keep insisting until you give in. Do you really want that?
- 2) Your reasons might end up sounding like an excuse and you may lose credibility.

In short, LESS IS MORE!



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Useful cues at work

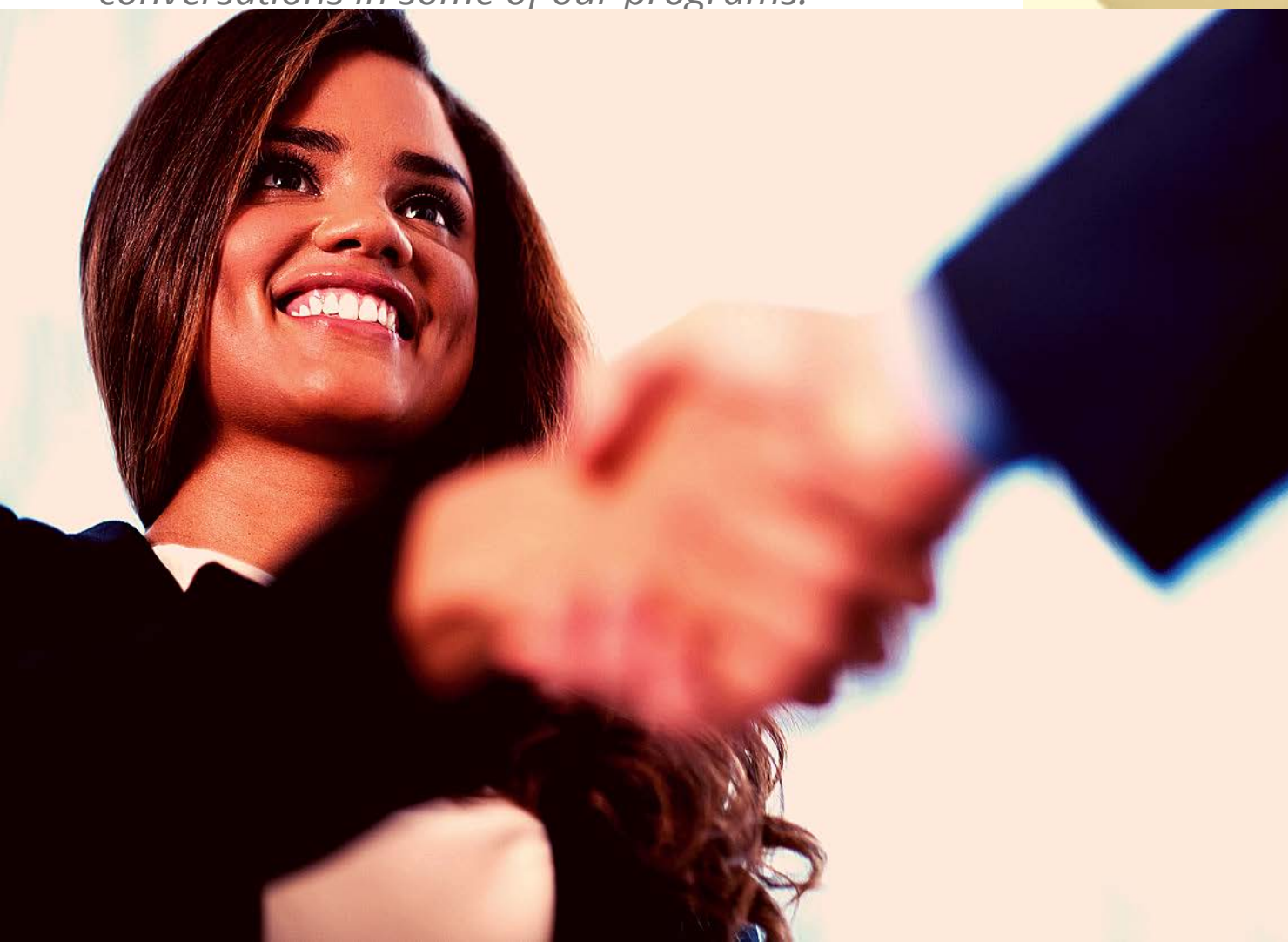
No need to reinvent the wheel, you can use these sentences.

We always say we don't choose our family, and even though we decide where we work - I hope you do - we don't pick all our colleagues, so it is specially helpful to be diplomatic when you want to say NO in order to preserve the good spirit. These are some ideas of expressions you can use when you want to say no to you co-workers, employees or managers.

- *I wish I could help you but...*
- *I would do it happily any other day...*
- *I see your problem...*

Just a side note: even though it is always good to be respectful, don't forget the respect you owe to yourself as well. Sometimes there is no other way than confrontation that can open the door to a great solution. *

**You can learn how to handle difficult conversations in some of our programs.*



YOU CAN SAY NO AND STILL BE PERCEIVED AS COOPERATIVE: NEGOTIATE TIMELINES OR RE-ASSESS PRIORITIES.

In an increasingly demanding work environment you need to invest your energy wisely in order to maintain good work life balance and preserve your energy in the long run. To that effect, it is important to be realistic with your workload and raise the red flag on time. Nobody knows better than you what you can or cannot do. It is not good though to be seen as a complainer or a negative person so with your team, customers or manager I would recommend you to suggest alternatives that could meet both parties' goals. It is about saying NO that does not sound like one

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Negotiating with your manager

You can say NO while you propose a solution

I am giving you below some examples to give you a hint of the style.

a) Can we discuss this tomorrow? I will have more time to give it the right attention.

b) Sure I can do it. I'm finishing XXX. Can you give me an extra day for it (XXX) for me to concentrate on this new project?

c) I see this is important: how urgent is it? I have several meetings today... (or whatever is in your schedule). Often things are not as important as they seem initially :)

BEFORE I GO...

I would recommend you keep this guide on your desk to be your daily reminder. Don't get discouraged if face some resistance at the beginning: people might not be used to you setting clear limits but if you don't start they never will.

Please see below summary of all the steps described on the guide for quick reference.

STEP 1: REMEMBER YOUR RIGHTS.

STEP 2: IDENTIFY YOUR NEEDS AND DEFINE YOUR BOUNDARIES.

STEP 3: LEARN FROM YOUR BEHAVIOUR.

STEP 4: BE PRESENT.

STEP 5: BUY YOURSELF TIME.

**STEP 6: SHOW EMPATHY.
DO NOT COMPROMISE YOUR BOUNDARIES.**

STEP 7: USE "I" IN YOUR REPLY.

**STEP 8: MAKE SHORT AND SIMPLE ANSWERS.
DO NOT GIVE UNNECESSARY
EXPLANATIONS.**

**STEP 9: DON'T COMPLICATE YOUR LIFE.
USE CUES THAT WORK.**

**STEP 10: SAY NO WITHOUT SAYING NO.
PROPOSE ALTERNATIVES.**

**AND MOST IMPORTANT...
DON'T FORGET TO SMILE!**