

WORK & FAMILY LIFE

BALANCING JOB AND PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

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Practical solutions
for family, workplace
and health issues

WHAT'S INSIDE

ELDER ISSUES

Raising the alcohol issue
with an older relative

4

PARENTING

Helping kids balance
the "I" and the "we"

5

ON THE JOB

It sure is hard to
remember names at work

6

A HEALTHY YOU

How exercise boosts
the learning process

7

INTERCHANGE

Men feel work-family
conflicts, too

3

RESEARCH REVIEW

"Fat bias" starts early
and takes a serious toll

3

WE RECOMMEND

354 ways to say "no"
and mean it

8

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"I wish I could but I'm really on overload this week. Try me again another time."

No, a two-letter word we don't say enough

By Susan Newman, PhD

We live in a world that lauds the power of saying "yes." Blogs, self-help books and even the plots of novels and movies suggest that saying yes will be a rewarding experience in your life.

Saying yes can indeed help you keep the peace at home and it can strategically shore up your place on the job. It sends the message that you're a team player and increases your value to the company.

When a family member or close friend is ill or hurt and needs your help, yes, of course, you'll be there for him or her. Or when a colleague is going through a personal crisis, you'll be supportive. In other words, saying yes is often a very good thing.

Yes, sure, no problem—really?

But here's the issue. Those words "yes," "sure" and "no problem" can fly out of your mouth before the reality or the enormity of your commitment registers. You realize, too late, that you don't want—or have the time—to do what you've agreed to take on.

You really don't want to babysit for your friend's kids this weekend. You definitely don't want to walk your brother's pesky dog every time he asks. And, you may wonder, "How did I get roped into planning that farewell party for a coworker?"

Think about why you say yes so quickly

It could be that you've always been a "people pleaser." Growing up, you were taught to be nurturing. You take care of others, and the people in your life have come to expect it. Maybe you like the feeling of being needed.

Or saying yes is just how you've functioned for what seems like forever. And when you're indecisive, wishy-washy or reluctant to state your own needs, you leave the door open to saying yes, yet again.

It could be that you're a "busy junkie." The more you can cram into a single day, the happier you are. Yes is the default position for many overcommitted people. You may even rationalize: "I already have so much on my plate, what's one more task?"

Continued on page 2...

No, a two-letter word...

Continued from page 1...

Saying yes to something you don't want to do can be a way to avoid unpleasantness. Sometimes it's just the path of least resistance. But it can also take the fun out of whatever you are doing.

Here are some signs that you may have become a "yes person," to your own detriment.

- You don't have enough time to exercise, relax, get enough sleep, or do what you set out to do.

- Sometimes you feel like you're doing too much for others and not enough for yourself.

- You're often unable to express in words what you truly want.

- You say yes, then you regret it. You feel manipulated or duped. But when you turn someone down, you feel guilty.

- Some relationships feel way too one-sided. You wonder: "What does this person ever do for me?"

- People see you as "always available" for things that need doing.

- You want to be seen always as "responsible and reliable," and it's important to feel loved or liked.



"Family time. Time with our kids. That's my priority."

- You accept invitations so you won't "miss out" on something.

- You think, "I don't have as much fun anymore."

Saying no is a learned skill

Kids have no trouble saying no, but the older we get, the harder it seems. Mastering the skill of saying no may require moving out of your comfort zone. Here are some basic steps. Apply them, and you'll start to get the knack of it.

- Accept that saying no does not make you aggressive, obnoxious, selfish or controlling. It means you know how to protect yourself.

- Get your priorities straight. Who gets first dibs? Your spouse? Your children? Friends? Your boss?

- Pay attention to how you parcel out your time, and stop trying to do it all. Accept that you have physical and emotional limits.

- Minimize your responsibility by giving more control to others.

Give it some thought

Before you respond to a request that involves a major commitment of your time, say you'll think it over and ask yourself these questions. Your answers will help you to better mark your boundaries:

Do I have the time? Or what will I have to give up to do this?

Will I be upset with myself after I say yes? Will I feel coerced? Will I resent the person asking?

Will I feel pressured to get the job done on a timely basis?

What do I gain if I agree to do this?

Be forthright and clear

An easy way to say no is to tell a small (or big) lie. "Sorry, but I have plans all weekend." "I'd love to, but my dog is sick." "I promised to clean the garage."

It's best to *not* gild your refusal with a lie or offer a lame excuse. Lies and excuses are often counter-productive. They tend to be guilt-inducing as well—and guilt is precisely what you want to avoid.

Consider the list below as part of your go-to response arsenal.

I'd prefer not to at this time.

As much as I'd like to help, I'm not the right person for this job.

Regrettably (sadly or unhappily) I can't. I wish I could, but...

Try me again another time.

Thank you for asking. But I'm on overload and just can't do one more thing now.

The upside to a no

When you give others your time and services, you have to be selective. If you say yes too often, it will eventually force you to say no to someone you really want to help or something you would really like to do.

It takes a conscious effort to analyze a request first, before jumping to a yes. But it's worth the effort—because learning to say no gracefully will move *you* to the front of the line of people you truly want to please. Which is exactly where you belong. ♦

—Adapted from the author's book *The Book of No: 365 Ways to Say It and Mean It—and Stop People-Pleasing Forever.* See *We Recommend* on page 8 and www.susannewmanphd.com.

Getting to 'no' in 3 situations

Situation 1 "I'm going away next week. I know you love dogs. Will you take Jasper for the week?" a friend asks. "You'll have fun with him."

What's going on here Yes, you do love dogs, but Jasper is big and strong, and he can become aggressive with other dogs. You are not sure that you can control him.

Response "As much as I'd like to help out, I don't think I can handle Jasper. Let's think about someone else who can take him."

Alert Whatever the situation, it's hard to argue with honesty about your feelings and concerns as a reason for saying no.

Situation 2 "We're holding a garage sale in two weeks. Will you help me set it up and keep me company?"

What's going on here You are wanted—and needed—for your ability to organize. Your friend will want you at her house days in advance to help her sort, price, set up tables and tell her what to do by way of advertising. You'll be enlisted to post signs. Her event could take days of your time.

Response "I have all day Friday to get you ready, but I can't be there on sale day."

Alert Be discerning in how you offer your time. Do what you can to have your friend's event run smoothly, but define the amount of time you can give.

Situation 3 "We found you the perfect guy. Dinner at our place? Judd and I will be there to make the introduction and keep the conversation moving."

What's going on here You've been on a lot of blind dates, none of which were remotely interesting—especially those arranged by Judd and Farah. They think they're doing you a favor, but you know the routine. It will be another awkward, uncomfortable evening that can't end soon enough.

Response "No, thank you. It's sweet of you to worry about me, but I'm taking a break from blind dates."

Alert Because people care about you doesn't mean they understand what you want in a partner. Good friends will not abandon you because you turn down their date "finds." They will just keep looking. ♦

365 ways to say ‘no’ and mean it

Do you get roped into things you really don’t want to do? Do people always turn to you for favors?

Saying “no” to the people in our lives is hard for most of us. But constantly saying “yes” can cause anxiety, stress, regret and feelings of powerlessness.

The new, expanded edition of *The Book of No* by psychologist Susan Newman, PhD is replete with research findings and timely scenarios that offer ways to say “no” without feeling guilty or damaging relationships.

The goal of this valuable book is to help you analyze and respond

to requests for your time, talent, muscle, money and knowhow that pull you in too many directions and gobble up precious time.

The book is divided into sections with “Scenarios” illustrating typical situations that occur at home and at work. The author makes it easy to find practical solutions to help you deal with the people in your life who can get you to a “yes” with great regularity.

Each Scenario addresses “What’s Going on Here.” It describes

possible motives for an “Ask.” It suggests words for a “Response” that provides a gracious refusal. Also, there’s an “Alert” with tips and information for the future.

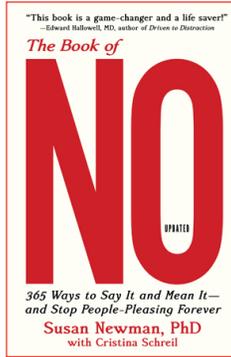
In a section called “With Friends,” you’ll learn to ask yourself if the give and take in a friendship is equitable—or is someone taking advantage of your good nature.

Dr. Newman believes every family has a “yes” person who gives in to requests and handles

problems, especially around holidays and family celebrations—and this is a hard cycle to break. But she makes the case that it’s not fair and tells how to break the pattern (*see Front Page feature*).

If you find it hard to say “no,” this book will give you a reservoir of 365 ways to do so gracefully—and a better grasp of what to refuse and why.

The Book of No: 365 Ways to Say It and Mean It—and Stop People-Pleasing Forever (Turner Publishing) will be available on December 5 in bookstores and online in paperback, hardcover and Kindle editions. ♦



Work & Family Life provides information and practical solutions to a wide range of family, job, and health issues. Our purpose is to help our readers reduce their stress and find pleasure and satisfaction in their many roles at work, at home, and in their communities.

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