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Learn how to say no at work

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By Howard Riell, Special to VEGAS INC Monday, March 6, 2017 - 2 a.m.

Afraid to say “no” to your boss or co-workers? Don’t know how?

You’re not alone.

Work relationships are fraught with the potential for misunderstanding, overstepped bounds and bruised egos. But telling someone no can have an upside, like helping establish ideal work-life boundaries or reasonable expectations with a boss, or cultivating respect from coworkers.

The balance, needless to say, can prove a delicate one.

“We live in a culture where it’s ‘bad’ to say no to someone of authority, particularly your boss,” said Isaac Bardos, a certified professional coach in Henderson. “That’s probably because as an employee, you fear the repercussions of saying no to someone who has power

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That said, Bardos asked, “Have you ever respected someone more after they told you no? Did you find yourself wanting to ask them again because there was part of you that felt getting their yes was actually worth more now that they had said no? We all know people who are ‘yes people.’ While it can be quite convenient to have yes people in your life, do you respect that characteristic about them?”

Bardos calls it beneficial to say no “when what you’re saying no to is over-extending yourself. For example, if by saying yes it would add more stress and detract from your quality of life or your ability to balance what’s currently on your plate, it seems that a no might serve you and your co-worker well.”

No is “a powerful and important word,” Bardos said. “But it is important to understand that when you hear a no from your partner, friend, boss or family member, remind yourself that when the other person tells you no, they are not saying no to you, they are saying no to your idea or request. Before you say no to your boss, explain this to him: You are saying no to the idea or request, not no to him, which could be interpreted as a blatant personal rejection.”

“What is so critical to remember is that every time you say yes to a request, by definition you are intentionally or unintentionally saying no to something else or someone else,” said Sheri Bardos, a career coach and the principal of Bardos Psychological Services in Henderson. “That could take the form of saying no to yourself, and thereby cutting out a well-needed lunch break to relax and recharge so you can work more efficiently and feel good. Saying yes could lead to saying no to a more important project or deadline. I often encourage my clients to have a direct and open dialogue with whomever is making the request to clarify what they would like prioritized.”

There is, Sheri says, a “very clear distinction between saying no to a boss versus a co-worker. In order to maintain your job, and depending on a variety of factors, it might be more effective to say yes to a boss while having an open discussion about what might be needed to make that happen. If your boss just assumes you will make time for everything, and has an unrealistic view of what you can get done, then you might want to seek out a competent career coach to smoothly navigate that process.”

If it is a co-worker of your own status, she added, “then saying no may be critical to keeping stress low and feeling balanced.”

Generational differences also must be factored in. Las Vegas attorney James Goodnow, a shareholder at Fennemore Craig, said many believe that nothing makes a Millennial happier than saying no. “Not true. More than a time or two, I’ve heard Baby Boomers and Gen-Xers slam Millennials who say no to projects or extra work as selfish and lazy — citing their decision as proof that Millennials are an inferior generation. This view is misguided.”

Goodnow insists that while it is true that Millennials may say no more than workers from previous generations, “the reasons for it may be different than many believe. Millennials in many ways represent the pendulum swinging back from the focus on work that drove the economic boom... When millennials say no to work, we are at the same time saying yes to a richer, more sustainable life that values hard work at the office, but that is not necessarily defined by it.”

No Right, No Wrong

Not surprisingly, there is no shortage of advice on the right and wrong instances and ways to say no.

Tanenbaum also recommended having “a diplomatic, solutions-oriented conversation, where you say, ‘I don’t think I can do what you’re proposing, but I can do this ...’”

n Have a rationale: Dr. Jonathan Salinas, a vocal cord specialist with Ear, Nose and Throat Consultants of Nevada, said employees should “express understanding for the thought process behind the request. Next, the employee should present the alternative solution they feel more comfortable with, stating the reason for declining the request. To say no without a rationale could be interpreted as disrespectful.”

· Start a dialogue: “Hard no’s can be problematic,” said Micah E. Phillips, executive vice president and marketing director at Nevada State Bank. “A no should really be part of a dialogue on priorities and options. Focusing on common objectives will help lead to shared perspectives.”

The wrong way to say no, Phillips added, is “a no that involves no dialogue. It is the quickest way to establish that you aren’t willing to support the other person, even if that isn’t the intention.”

Will striking so fine a balance always prove easy?

Most likely ... no.

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