

How To Deal With Negative People

HANDOUT #1: The Language of NO

Every group, community, and organization has its own vocabulary and language. The Land of NO is no exception. Here are some common expressions of negativity. Which ones do you encounter in your daily life?

"That will never work."

"We've tried that before."

"They'll never let us do that."

"Now is not the time."

"Let's think about it for a while."

"It's too risky."

"We can't do that."

"It will be too much work."

**"There must be a reason no one
has done it before."**

**"What evidence do you have that
it will work?"**

"There must be an easier way."

"We're too busy."

"It'll never fly."

"It's not my job."

"That's not the way we do things here."

"That's great, but who's going to do it?"

"Let's table it for now."

"Sorry, no budget for it."

"It's not my fault ..."

"That's not exactly what I had in mind."

**"The last person who tried something like
that..."**

"I like my idea much better."

"Maybe next year."

"Yeah, but..."

"No way."

There are also nonverbal NOs. These include: rolling eyes, heavy sighs, tapping fingers, looking at the clock, frowning, scowling, looking exasperated, and so on.

What negative expressions do you encounter most frequently?

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HANDOUT #2:

Some of the Many Reasons Why People Say NO...

NO perceived need.

NO perceived benefits.

NO clear understanding.

NO time or resources to “experiment.”

NO involvement in the idea.

NO credibility for the person with the idea.

NO positive past experience/track record.

NO perceived flexibility.

NO perceived freedom to fail.

NO authority on the part of the decision-maker.

What are some other reasons people say no?

Circle the top three reasons for NO that you encounter most. As you read on, start to strategize how you can start shifting some of those NOs into YES.

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HANDOUT #3:

What Do You Hear When Someone Says NO?

When we hear NO, it is largely a function of who we are, rather than the actual NO. Our self-esteem, confidence, optimism, or pessimism colors how we hear and interpret NO from others.

Some people hear:

- **“You’re stupid. Why on earth did you bring this to me?”**
- **“What were you thinking?”**
- **“You’re a loser.”**
- **“I don’t like you.”**
- **“You’ll never amount to anything in this organization.”**
- **“Who do you think you are?”**
- **“If I want you to have good ideas, I’ll give them to you!”**

These people personalize every NO. They interpret rejection as a sign of personal incompetence or stupidity. They suffer greatly in the face of NO and are not inclined to persist and risk more rejection and potential humiliation.

Other people hear:

- **“Not now. Ask again another time.”**
- **“It doesn’t fit with my priorities or the organization’s plans.”**
- **“I’m the wrong person to ask.”**
- **“This would mean more work for me. Make it easier.”**
- **“I’m not sold yet. Bring me more convincing data.”**
- **“It’s too expensive. See if you can bring the cost down and we’ll talk.”**
- **“I won’t sign on until I know my boss will like it.”**
- **“Tell me how it can make a difference.”**

These people encounter NO but hear different messages entirely. They interpret rejection as a temporary setback. They retreat and regroup in order to try again later. They won’t be deterred from their desired goal.

What do you hear when you encounter NO?

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HANDOUT #4: Learning from NO

While no one likes to be on the receiving end of NO, we can often learn from our negative encounters:

- NO can teach us where others' boundaries and limits are.
- NO can show us how to be more persuasive in making our case.
- NO shows us where our blind spots are.
- NO helps us develop patience, tenacity, and character.
- NO makes us reconsider and reevaluate our own position.
- NO can help us to see others' points of view more clearly.
- NO shows us where we might be wrong.
- NO can be a clue that others are challenged and stressed and we might be able to help.
- NO can push us to work harder for something we really want.
- NO sometimes mirrors our own fears and doubts.
- NO helps us become more creative and resourceful.
- NO reminds us not to take things too personally.
- NO challenges us to do better.
- NO can make the eventual YES more meaningful.

NO can be a valuable teacher if you are willing to learn from it. Sometimes it's good to be grateful to NO.

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HANDOUT #5:

Creating a World of YES Wherever You Are

While we are looking for more YESes in the Land of NO where we live and work, we need to remember that others may want a YES from us. How can we contribute to transforming the Land of NO into a World of YES? What can we do to find ways to say YES more often?

LOOK FOR WHAT YOU LIKE IN PEOPLE, PLACES, SITUATIONS, AND IDEAS.

For many of us, our inclination is to notice what we don't like. It's simply a habit. And habits can be changed. Make a point to actively look for what you like, both at work and at home. Say, "YES, I like that," more often.

PIGGYBACK ON OTHER PEOPLE'S YESSES.

Instead of saying, "YES, but . . .," learn to say, "YES, and here's how I can see that working," or "YES, and here's how I can help make that idea or project even better."

WHEN YOU FEEL THE URGE TO SAY NO TO SOMEONE, STOP YOURSELF, TAKE A BREAK, AND REFLECT BEFORE YOU SPEAK.

Why are you saying NO? What is getting in the way of saying YES? Have a conversation with the person asking for YES and share your concerns; see if he or she can address your issues to help change your NO to YES.

MODEL THE BEHAVIORS YOU SEEK FROM OTHERS.

If you want others to do their homework before bringing you an idea, do the same with them. If you want coworkers, family members, and friends to say YES to you, look for opportunities to say YES to them. Remember: What goes around comes around.

BE RESOURCEFUL IN FINDING WAYS TO SAY YES.

Don't hide behind policies or tradition to say, "NO, it can't be done," or "NO, we've never done that before." It's easy and safe to say NO — it takes courage to say YES. Be courageous. If someone has a good idea, help them make it happen.

RECOGNIZE OTHERS WHO ARE POSITIVE INFLUENCES IN THE LAND OF NO.

Tell them how much you admire and respect their can-do attitude. Express your appreciation for all the ways they say YES. Let them know how much you enjoy being around them and/or working with them.

Whether your Land of NO is at work, at home, in school, in personal relationships, or in your community, you can make a significant difference in lowering the level of negativity. Your YESes will add up. Other YESes will join yours. YES is contagious; it feels good.

Start now — right where you are. Find more ways to say YES.