

You Have To “NO” Better To Do Better

Identifying The Inherent Advantages Of Learning To Say No

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Before you think the title is a typo, let me assure you it isn't. Your future leadership effectiveness is tied directly to your ability to say no to distractions, no to non-mission centric activities, and no to getting roped into other peoples' pet projects. This seems simple on the surface, just as most critical success activities always do. But it remains difficult to execute well and to execute consistently - just as all critical success activities are.

Saying “no” has gotten a bum rap, and this bum rap has prevailed for quite some time. Quickly, when you think of someone saying no, what picture comes to mind for you? It seems the most immediate illustrations to come to mind include those of an obstinate 2-year old that is mesmerized by the word, or a gathering of 535 governmental leaders – called congress – whose use of the word “no” has earned members of a particular party a rather unflattering tagline. In either case the prevailing connotation remains negative and often elicits negative reactions and responses from others. This is unfortunate, because until you learn to get comfortable with saying “no,” you will never get comfortable being a leader in a complex, fast-paced, and/or political environment.

Contrary to the common misperception, leaders must learn to say no and to say no as often as necessary. Saying no doesn't mean you are uncooperative or something less than a team player. It simply means that what was requested falls outside of what is central or key to your success. As a leader, you must come to terms with the reality and necessity of saying no. In fact, there are inherent and explicit advantages to saying no. Below is a short, but compelling, list of three benefits of mastering the rationale and practice of saying no:

1 - Upholds The Integrity Of The Vision. The organizational vision should be specific and should have boundaries. A vision without boundaries is a vision which will never be actualized. The boundaries of the vision allow and require the leader to say no to those activities which fall outside of the scope of the vision. Saying no upholds the integrity of the vision. Honoring the integrity of the vision allows the organization to excel in its expressed purpose. No one organization can be everything to everyone.

2 - Promotes Excellent Stewardship of Resources. There is perhaps no faster way to render an organization ineffective as to squander its resources. The inability or unwillingness to say no to requests not central to your team's mission will result in an expenditure of resources at a rate which can't be sustained. When I speak of resources here I am not speaking of physical resources only, but I'm referring to intangible resources such as drive, innovation, and initiative. Saying no to the frivolous and ancillary will ensure you have the resources required to accomplish your top level tasks and achieve your highest priority goals.

3 - Builds Intestinal Fortitude. Every leader comes to the realization that he or she can't make everyone happy – at the same time. While it is difficult to say no, it is absolutely essential to your effectiveness as a leader to do so. If you can't or won't say no to others, you will be used as a clog in the accomplishment of their goals, while your objectives languish on the vine. With practice you will strengthen your intestinal fortitude and saying no – when appropriate - becomes easier to do. Simply put, you can't say yes to every request and expect to be both highly effective and highly efficient. You may be very popular, but the odds, under those circumstances are against you being productive and profitable.

Leaders who have mastered the rationale and art of saying no to requests that have the potential to result in their teams being sidetracked, overtasked, or otherwise distracted are genuinely respected and appreciated by their peers and colleagues alike. When based on good and sound reasoning saying no clears the way to superior results at the bottom line and superior levels of respect in the break room.

Leadership Lesson: "NO!" There, you said it. Saying no to requests not central to the team's mission and vision is the simplest way to increase productivity and profitability. Simply put, you can't say yes to every request and expect to be both highly effective and highly efficient. You may be popular, but the odds are against you being productive and profitable. Until you learn to get comfortable with saying "no," you will never get comfortable leading in a complex, fast-paced, and/or political environment.

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