

20 Polite Ways To Say No

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Many people I speak to and coach are feeling more and more overwhelmed. The demands that are placed on us and we place on ourselves seem to be increasing and, with our natural desire to please people, look capable and be liked, it seems that saying "no" is very hard for a lot of us.

People pleasing is such a common trait that it is second only to Impostor Syndrome in the traits I see when coaching and, while it is a very good thing to be nice, do good things, help out and take a "can do" approach, if we overdo our people pleaser trait then it can be very detrimental.

Therefore, it is important to develop our ability to say "no"...nicely yet assertively. So here's my starter for 20...

1. I can **definitely get back to you** on that one by the end of the week/month.
2. I could only do that **if you could** make [this other, bigger task] disappear for me.
3. I don't have the capacity to do that to the **standard that you deserve**.
4. I know the **perfect person** who would be better suited to that.
5. If you ask me again in a week/month's time I **might** be able to help.
6. You know I'm always happy to help you **whenever I can** but this just isn't one of those situations...sorry.
7. I actually would really like to do that and I **could do it next month**.
8. I can't do that myself but I **will reach out** to my network for you and see who else might be available.
9. That sounds like **more than I can handle** right now but here's what I **could** do...

10. I like you too much/**have too much respect for you** to try and help you when I know I wouldn't be able to **do it properly** with all the other commitments I have right now.
11. I promised my **therapist** that I wouldn't take on any more work right now!
12. There's no way I could do as good a job as you on this so what **would it take** for you to be able to do it yourself?
13. I have a very **clear rule** about situations like this; it's not just you. [I never lend more than £20 to friends for example]
14. I'm afraid I can't do that because I'm **gluten/lactose/jerk intolerant**. :-)
15. You know I'm a people-pleaser so **you will appreciate** how hard it is for me to say no but I really must.
16. I can't do **exactly** what you want there but I **could** do it **if** [I had twice as long/the scope was reduced/...]
17. If asking for my help was illegal, what **other** options would you have?
18. That actually sounds much more fun than what I'm currently doing but I **promised myself** that I won't be someone who breaks their commitments.
19. I would **need a day** to look at my commitments and schedule before I could commit to that. I will get back to you in 24 hours to tell you **if** it's possible.
20. Let me ask [**senior person/wife/husband/kids**] if they are happy for me to drop what I'm doing to do this instead.

An alternative to "no" (and you might notice this a few times in the list above) is "Yes, if..."

Responding with "Yes, if..." can appear more positive, collaborative and less confrontational. That doesn't necessarily make it better though. By opening yourself up to negotiation, there is still a good chance that you will take on more and more (and people may then start playing negotiation games!) so make sure the "if..." is enough.