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# What is the cost of being a people pleaser?

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As an executive coach, I work with people on setting boundaries and priorities so they are better able to meet their goals and objectives. That task can be challenging for those who are compelled to be the ultimate go-to, yes-I-will, yes-I-can, do-everything-for-everyone type of person.

Let's call those types "people pleasers."

You know who they are: constantly doing for others and always saying "Yes," resulting in an inability to set their own boundaries and priorities. Coaching them is a challenging yet mind-opening experience.

People pleasers are so concerned about pleasing others that they end up overlooking what really matters. By being agreeable always, they choose to live with unnecessary overload and anxiety.

That's not to say that people pleasers don't gain something. They do. They receive confirmation that they are needed, indispensable and well-liked. However, their excessive desire to please means they may not be able to follow through with certain projects. People pleasers, therefore, ultimately end up disappointing others and feeling guilty.

Is it worth it?

## Check yourself

Do you spend time in areas not valued by your manager? Do you waste time on projects and activities that aren't in sync with your values in life? Do you always say "Yes" because you are uncomfortable saying "No"?

*If you answered "Yes" to any of those questions, do the following self-assessment:*

**1. What do you really need to do and why?**

**2. What do you value?** Note that this doesn't ask "What *should* I value?" Answers could be family, health, spirituality, relationships, money, travel, appreciation, etc.

**3. What percentage of your working time** do you spend on what really needs to be done vs. what

your position dictates should be done?

**4. What do you spend your waking hours doing?**

**5. What are you willing to give up doing** so you can spend more time on what you truly value or on critical tasks?

**6. How can you make No. 5 happen?** What can you delegate? Could you hire others to do certain tasks? What really doesn't need to be done now, or even at all? Where can you say that "good enough" really *is* good enough? When can you say "No"?

"No" starts with your being able, in good conscience, without guilt, to say "Enough is enough; I can't do it all." If you can't say "No," you will end up chasing your tail, potentially driving yourself—and others—crazy or perhaps making yourself ill. Needless to say, once you have hit that stage, you are good to no one.

## Pare your to-do list

Are you ready to take the next step, changing from a people pleaser to someone who knows when and how to say "No" confidently and clearly? *Start with the following areas:*

- **At work.** If you are the leader, practice your delegating skills. If you are constantly redoing team members' work, ask yourself: "How much did my efforts add? What was the message to staffers—did my intervention enable or disable them for the future? Was it necessary?"

If you are an employee who constantly says "Yes" to the boss only to become frustrated and fall behind, it's time to set boundaries. Tell your manager: "I am happy to do this; here is what I am working on now. What is the priority?" Or break a project into chunks: "I can accomplish this by tomorrow, but the rest won't be done until next week."

- **Outside of work.** Get involved within trade associations, children's activities, religious groups, boards of directors and so on. Just know that those

commitments, however, can become a full-time job if you let them.

The problem is, the more involved you are, the greater the chance that you will become overextended. Be honest with yourself and with others regarding how much time you truly can invest.

**Key:** If you agree to do something, understand your motivation. You can have many good reasons; however, ego shouldn't be one of them. It is natural to want to be loved, admired and respected, and to enjoy adjectives like "perfect," "dedicated," "smart" and "accomplished." The problem is that if your ego drives your desire to be a people pleaser, you ultimately will find yourself being spread too thin.

• **On the home front.** Examples of "letting go" may include the following ideas:

- Laundry doesn't have to be folded perfectly.
- Beds don't have to be made every day.
- The lawn doesn't have to be mowed in perfect rows each week.
- Dinner can include takeout or consist solely of sandwiches.
- Your car doesn't need to be hand-washed and waxed monthly.

I ask you: *What do you need to stop doing? Where do you need to say "No"?*

As you look over your daily to-do list, identify items you can cross off because they don't need to be done by you, at all or to perfection. Then practice saying all those "No" phrases so they roll off the tip of your tongue with ease:

- "No." No further explanation is necessary.
- "Not now."
- "Who else could do that since I am unavailable?"
- "I am overextended; what is the priority?"
- "I am unable to commit."
- "I would love to help you, but not at this time."
- "I will do X but no more/not now."

**Note:** An apology is NOT necessary with any of those statements.

## How to communicate 'No'

So far, I have been talking about self-discipline and setting boundaries for yourself and with others when it comes to saying "No."

Once you decide to say "No," watch how you say it and how it comes across. I am referring to body language and vocal elements like tone and volume.

Choose open body language: Don't cross your arms, don't point fingers and so on. A smile, combined with direct eye contact, can go a long way. The goal is to look confident without being intimidating.

Your voice must reflect the same confidence. When you end any statement with a rising intonation, you sound as though you are asking a question or seeking permission. You could say "I can't do that now" as a question or as a declarative statement, depending on your emphasis. If your volume is too soft, you

sound tentative. If you shout, you sound aggressive.

If you expect others to take your words seriously, you must come across assertively. So what's the bottom line? Be clear about what and why you are doing things. Stay focused on your goals, on your values and on what really matters.

When you choose to say "No," say it clearly, concisely and confidently. You will be surprised how respectful others become, and you will be happier, healthier and more productive.

**About the author:** *Communication Briefings* editorial advisory board member Marjorie Brody, CSP, PCC, CPAE Speaker Hall of Fame, is founder and CEO of BRODY Professional Development, a Jenkintown, Pa.-based business communication and presentation skills company that offers training programs, executive coaching and keynote/workshop presentations.

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