Skills 360 – Saying No (Part 1)

Discussion Questions

1. Do you usually find it difficult to say "no" when someone asks you to do something?
2. Who do you have the most difficulty saying "no" to?
3. Why do you think saying "no" can sometimes be difficult?

Vocabulary

Paperwork: the part of a job or project that involves writing, filling out forms, and keeping records; "I can't believe how much paperwork there was in the sale of my business."

Panicked: very worried, afraid, or unable to think clearly and calmly; "Brad was really panicked when he realized that he hadn't met his monthly sales quota."

Messed up: disorganized, messy, or generally not the way it should be; "My computer is all messed up again, so I think I'll call the tech guys to clean it up."

Agreeable: nice, kind, or pleasant; "A receptionist who isn't agreeable can strongly affect people's first impression of a business."

To overcommit: to accept or promise to do more than you actually can; "I really overcommitted when I agreed to serve on the conference planning committee *and* play soccer."

Disaster: something very bad that happens and causes a lot of problems or damage; "The meeting between management and the union was a disaster; there will probably be strike vote soon."

To make a big deal of something: to treat something as more important, more serious, or more terrible than it really is; "Come on Dave, don't make such a big deal of the lunch. I know it wasn't great, but it was just lunch."

Refusal: the act of not accepting something or saying you won't do something; "The city's refusal of our bid was surprising considering we are the cheapest *and* fastest."

Apologetic: showing or saying you are sorry for something; "Although the accountant was very apologetic for his mistakes, we decided to let him go."

To foul something up: to cause problems with something by making mistakes; "Bad customer service can really foul up a good business relationship."

To hedge: to avoid saying something or making a decision clearly and directly; "You don't have to hedge. Just tell me whether you think you can come to the event or not."

To leave the door open to something: to allow for some possibility; "We didn't sign agreement, but we left the door open for future negotiation."

Turnaround (time): amount of time required to complete something; "We need a quick turnaround on this order to France, otherwise we'll miss the deadline."

Timeframe: the period of time or rough schedule during which something happens; "Good project management involves setting realistic timeframes to different activities."

To highlight: to talk about something in a way that helps people notice or see it; "The speaker's personal stories really highlighted the need for a more open management structure."

To be frank: open and honest; "Well Tom, to be frank, I think you've done a pretty poor job on this."

To be behind: not on schedule, or not happening at the expected or proper time; "I'm really behind today, so I think I'll have to skip the afternoon meeting."

Diplomacy: the ability to say things or deal with things sensitively, so that people are not upset or hurt; "Company representatives must keep diplomacy in mind when speaking in public."

To shut the door in someone's face: a very strong refusal; "I asked Tony for a pay raise, but he shut the door in my face saying there's no chance this year."

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Transcript

Hello and welcome back to the Skills 360 podcast! I'm your host Tim Simmons.

Today I want to start with a situation. Imagine this: you are sitting in your office trying to catch up on paperwork. A colleague walks in with a panicked look on his face. He says, "This proposal has to go out by 4:00pm but the formatting is all messed up. Could you help me?"

Sound familiar? And I bet you'd like to reply, "I'm afraid I'm too busy at the moment." But what you really say is "well, okay." Or "hmm, I'm kinda in the middle of something but maybe during lunch…" Or "let me think about it…"

Why is it so difficult to say no? Well, of course you want to be polite, and kind, and agreeable, and a good person who helps out his co-workers. If it's a boss who is asking you for something, you may fear losing favor or opportunities. And if it's a client or customer asking for something, you might not want to ruin the relationship.

But what I want to tell you is that in many cases you *should* say no. And you should know *how* to say it. You and your time are important, and if you're too busy, well, you're too busy! You need to avoid overcommitting. If you try to do too much, you'll do nothing well. Saying yes to everything can lead to disaster, even though you feared the results of *not* saying yes.

And remember that people can usually see when you want to say no but can't. That doesn't make you appear very strong and confident. Those people will keep asking you until you find a way to say "no," clearly, firmly, and honestly.

That's the key: you need to be clear, firm, and honest. There are several ways we can do this.

First of all, treat "no" as a normal thing. If you make a big deal of your refusal, it will *seem* like a big deal. So avoid long explanations. And don't be too apologetic. Many people apologize automatically, saying "I'm so sorry Dave, but I can't." But should you really be sorry for being busy? Save your apologies for times when you really foul something up.

Second, learn to be firm. You may want to hesitate or hedge by saying "well, I'm not sure…" or "that *might* be possible…" In many cases, you're just doing this because you're trying to find a way to say no. So just say no firmly. Don't leave the door open to negotiation or discussion. If it doesn't work, say "that doesn't work."

This is not only firm, but clear. You see, we often want to give excuses for not being able to do something without saying clearly that we can't. So your boss asks you to come in on Saturday, and you say "Gee, that's the weekend, and I was thinking of going golfing." That's not clear. "I can't come in on Saturday" *is* clear.

People appreciate honesty, so tell them the truth. If something is not possible, say so. And be specific. So if a customer asks for a quick turnaround when your company doesn't have the resources to make it happen, then say that. Like this: "There's no way we can do it in that timeframe." You can even *highlight* your honesty by starting with something like "I have to be frank here" or "to be perfectly honest with you." That emphasizes the fact that you're being realistic.

One final tip for today: if you really want to be clear, the start your response with our magic word itself. That's right, just say "no." Of course, you might want to say a bit more than that. Just "no" is rude. But consider something like this: "No, Dave, I can't help you right now because I'm behind on my own work." That's clear, firm and honest.

Now you might be thinking that sometimes you need more diplomacy. You can't just shut the door in someone's face with a clear and firm "no." Well, that's what we'll talk about next time. We'll learn some ways to soften our "no"s, while keeping them firm and clear.

That's all for today. If you'd like to test yourself on what we've just covered, have a look at the my-BE-online.com website. There you'll find a quiz about today's show as well as a complete transcript.

So long. And see you again soon.

Review Quiz

1.   Why does Tim describe a situation in which a colleague asks to help with the formatting of a proposal?
     A   To prove a point about colleagues
     B   To give an example of a situation when you want to say "no"
     C   To demonstrate the importance of computer skills
     D   To suggest that sometimes saying "no" is easy

2.   Which of the following are mentioned as reasons why it may be difficult to say "no"? [choose all that apply]
     A   You fear losing opportunities
     B   Saying "no" is discouraged in your culture
     C   You enjoy your work a lot
     D   You don't want to ruin a relationship
     E   You want to be polite
     F   You don't have enough time
     G   You want to be helpful

3.   According to Tim, the key to saying "no" effectively, is being…
     A   Polite, brief, and honest
     B   Clear, diplomatic, and apologetic
     C   Clear, firm, and honest
     D   Truthful, firm, and brief

4.   Which of the following does Tim say that you should *avoid* when saying "no"?
     A   Long explanations
     B   Clear expression
     C   Looking someone in the eye
     D   Informal language

5.   Which of the following is the best example of a clear and firm response?
     A   "I don't know Stu, that sounds pretty hard to me."
     B   "Do you mean today? Today is quite busy."
     C   "That's just not possible considering how much I am doing already."
     D   "Are you sure that needs to be done right away?"

6.   What does Tim say about the word "no"?
     A   It is impolite in all situations
     B   It is good to start your response with it
     C   It is best used by itself
     D   It can harm your relationships

Review Answers

1.   Why does Tim describe a situation in which a colleague asks to help with the formatting of a proposal?
     B   To give an example of a situation when you want to say "no"

2.   Which of the following are mentioned as reasons why it may be difficult to say "no"? [choose all that apply]
     A   You fear losing opportunities
     D   You don't want to ruin a relationship
     E   You want to be polite
     G   You want to be helpful

3.   According to Tim, the key to saying "no" effectively, is being…
     C   clear, firm, and honest

4.   Which of the following does Tim say that you should avoid when saying "no"?
     A   Long explanations

5.   Which of the following is the best example of a clear and firm response?
     C   "That's just not possible considering how much I am doing already."

6.   What does Tim say about the word "no"?
     B   It is good to start your response with it

Online Practice

Click the "Launch" button to open the **online practice:**