Skills 360 – Saying No (Part 2)

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

Unreliable: an "unreliable" person does things poorly, late, or not at all; "Don't ask Thomas to lead a project; he's too unreliable."

Anxiety: a feeling of worry or nervousness that something bad might happen; "Most people experience anxiety before and during an important job interview."

Overwhelmed: if you are "overwhelmed" with something such as work, it means you have far too much to do or deal with; "I'm so overwhelmed with work that I have to cancel my fishing trip and work over the weekend."

To offend: to make someone upset by doing or saying something, especially something inappropriate; "Jokes are useful in speeches, but you should avoid saying anything that might offend someone in the audience."

Uncooperative: not helpful; not willing to work with other people or make their work easier; "I'm surprised that our paper supplier is so uncooperative when it comes to arranging delivery outside usual business hours."

To sit on a committee: to be part of a group of people who meet for a special purpose; "David sits on a special committee formed to find out whether employees are happy with their benefits package."

Acknowledged: to show that you have heard, seen, or understood something; "Ken acknowledged that the expansion plans had problems, but he decided to proceed anyway."

To head up: to lead or be in control of a group or project; "You should choose someone who is organized and effective to head up each project."

To face: if you are "facing" a deadline, it means you are working to finish things before the deadline; if you are "facing" a problem, it means you are dealing with it; "We often call in extra staff when we're facing a deadline on a large or important contract."

A sense of responsibility: an understanding or awareness of the things that you should or must do; "Employees in small companies may feel a stronger sense of responsibility for the company as a whole."

Alternative: another possibility or option; "Waste Inc. can charge high prices because in this district because there is not alternative for garbage collection."

Branch: a smaller office separate from a company's headquarters; "BMO is based out of Toronto but has branches throughout North America."

To pay a visit: to go to see someone or a place, slightly formally; "Staff appeared nervous when they learned that the owner was going to pay a visit to the office."

Integrity: a person with "integrity" always does what he or she thinks is right, good, or honest, even when this is difficult; "The inspector maintained his integrity even when offered very enticing bribes."

Empathy: the capability to understand exactly how someone feels; "I feel great empathy for junior employees because I clearly remember the struggles I had in that position."

Work breakdown structure: a complete and organized list of all the tasks or jobs involved in a project; "After creating the work breakdown structure, we could then decide which parts of the project to outsource."

Ongoing: continuous; still happening or being done; "Several European countries have ongoing debt problems, which is affecting the entire EU."

Transcript

Hello and welcome back to the Skills 360 podcast. I'm your host Tim Simmons, and today we're talking about how to say "no." That's right, someone asks you for something or to do something, but you have to say "no". That's not always easy, but it's important.

Think about the results of *not* saying no. If you accept everything, you'll have too much to do and the quality of your work will suffer. Timelines will become unrealistic. You will be seen as nice, but possibly unreliable. And for you, it will mean more stress, anxiety and frustration. We've all experienced this. We're overwhelmed with work and realize that we should have said "no" somewhere along the way. And when we only have ourselves to blame, we feel terrible.

In our last episode, we learned some great ways to be firm, clear, and honest when saying "no". This will help you protect your time, your work, and your reputation. But of course you don't want to offend anyone. Sometimes we need to manage other people's feelings when we say no. Or we need to make sure we're not seen as uncooperative. Today, we'll look at some ways to do this.

One very common method is to use the word "but". If your co-worker asks you to sit on a special committee but you don't have the time, here's what you can say: "That committee is important, but I have too much work right now so I'm not going to be able to help." What you notice here is that you still have the clear and firm part: "I'm not going to be able to help." But *before* the word "but" you've acknowledged the other person's request. Saying "that committee is important" recognizes the other person's work.

Also notice in this case that there is a reason for the refusal: "I have too much work right now." You shouldn't give a long explanation, but reasons can definitely help soften the "no". And specific reasons are better than general ones. For example: "I can't commit to that because I am heading up the new design project and we are facing a big deadline." As you can see, your reason for saying "no" is a sense of responsibility to something else. And that is not a bad thing.

Another way you can soften your refusal is to offer something else in return. That something else could be a suggestion. For example: "I've got a big deadline so I can't help. But you might want to ask Todd. He's not busy today." You see? We can't help out directly, but we can offer a possible alternative solution.

The something that you offer could also be another part of you or your time. Imagine a colleague at another branch asks you to pay a visit and teach him how to use some new software. You don't have time to visit, but you could offer help in

another way. Like this: "I'm too busy to come by, but I could give you a half hour of help over the phone tomorrow."

You can see that in these situations, "no" is not the final word. You have a refusal and an alternative, which is still an attempt to help.

Remember that being firm and clear and protecting your time and integrity does not mean being rude. Someone might really need help, and you should show empathy. If you can manage all of these things in your refusal, you will earn people's respect. Think about how this sounds: "I understand you're under a lot of pressure Brenda. With my workload, I just can't give your project what it needs. It wouldn't work. But I can look over your work breakdown structure, and for ongoing help I suggest Greg. He'd be great for this." That response does everything a good refusal should.

Well, that's all for today. They wanted me to go on for another couple of minutes, but I said "no".

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.

Have a great summer and I'll be back after the break.

Review

1.   Which of the following does Tim mention as possible results of *not* saying "no"? [choose all that apply]

      A   Frustration
      B   Being overwhelmed with work
      C   Increased respect
      D   Reduced quality of work
      E   Quick professional advancement
      F   Unrealistic timelines
      G   Misunderstandings with colleagues
      H   Stress and anxiety

2.   Saying "no" firmly, clearly, and honestly will help protect your…

      A   Time, work, and reputation
      B   Health, time, and image
      C   Integrity, privacy, and importance
      D   Workload, deadlines, and relationships

3.   Tim gives this sentence as an example of refusal: "That committee is important, but I have too much work to do right now so I'm not going to be able to help." What role does the statement "That committee is important" play?

      A   It helps the listener guess what is coming next
      B   It acknowledges the person's request
      C   It emphasizes your commitment to the company
      D   It suggests exactly the opposite

4.   What does Tim say about the reasons for your refusal?

      A   You should avoid mentioning them
      B   You should explain them at length
      C   You should make up convincing ones
      D   You should give specific but brief ones

5.   What does Tim say you can offer as an alternative when you say no?

      A   A different part of you or your time
      B   Financial compensation
      C   An explanation
      D   A suggestion

Review Answers

1.   Which of the following does Tim mention as possible results of *not* saying "no"? [choose all that apply]
     A   **Frustration**
     B   **Being overwhelmed with work**
     D   **Reduced quality of work**
     F   **Unrealistic timelines**
     H   **Stress and anxiety**

2.   Saying "no" firmly, clearly, and honestly will help protect your…
     A   **Time, work, and reputation**

3.   Tim gives this sentence as an example of refusal: "That committee is important, but I have too much work to do right now so I'm not going to be able to help." What role does the statement "That committee is important" play?
     B   **It acknowledges the person's request**

4.   What does Tim say about the reasons for your refusal?
     D   **You should give specific but brief ones**

5.   What does Tim say you can offer as an alternative when you say no?
     A   **A different part of you or your time**
     D   **A suggestion**

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