

Work Smarter with the Gamonnet Method

Outlook, Notes, Google Enterprise, Mind Mapping, Office 365, Sharepoint



How To Say NO Without Destroying Important Relationships.



By Holly Weeks | 9:00 AM June 24, 2014

Many of us don't like to say no to a coworker or a boss—for instance, when the boss asks for a tighter deadline, or a team member needs a longer one—because we're worried about damaging the relationship. That's because it often feels synonymous with confrontation. And whether you are conflict-averse or conflict-ready, your counterpart may not always handle hearing NO the way you'd hoped.

Some counterparts will try to "yes the no," even when you're hoping for minimal friction, because they have learned early on not to take no for an answer and feel like pushovers if they do. Or he might get angry, push back, or go silent, because that's how he always handles hearing no.

There may also be something about the circumstances that makes it particularly difficult to accept your no. For example, someone who might be able to deal with a no privately could be embarrassed to hear it in front of others and may want you to back down so she can save face.

With all of these obstacles, there is no single trick to saying no while keeping your relationship intact. You can, however, change your perspective on what you're trying to do. Don't look at it as a choice between confrontation and preserving a relationship. There's a middle option: **the neutral NO.**



Work Smarter with the Gamonnet Method

Outlook, Notes, Google Enterprise, Mind Mapping, Office 365, Sharepoint

A neutral NO is steady, uninflected, and clear. It is mostly notable for what it is not: harsh, combative, apologetic, reluctant, or overly nice.

Going neutral may not be your default manner of speaking, but it is well within your reach. A neutral no protects you and your counterpart from the elements of no that are *really* hard on relationships, such as:

Giving false hope. If you say no tentatively, it's easy for your counterpart to hope that you'll change your mind. It sounds like your no is about to tip over into a yes, so your counterpart is encouraged to keep pushing. That false hope, even more than the no, may damage your relationship.

Weakening the NO. People often argue their no backwards: they start with lightweight reasons, holding back the real reason why they're saying no. But the little explanations are not persuasive and are easily batted aside. To limit frustration—and to avoid appearing disingenuous—give reasons with good weight up front.

By sticking with neutral, you are concentrating on the business end of no, not the personal. You should be aiming for a referee's kind of neutral demeanor. A ref makes a call, regardless of strong feelings on both sides. His job is to give his decision and stay with it if challenged.

You can also speak directly about the friction between you and your counterpart. To address the situation, try saying something like: "It's hard for me to tell you no. It must be hard for you to hear." Use your own language, but check that what you say is steady, uninflected, and clear. If you get pushback, keep these points in mind:

Stay on topic. If you think you know why your counterpart is pushing back, you can speak to his concern honestly: "You have a lot invested in what you're asking, and it looks like I'm personally blocking you." You can also give a good reason for your refusal: "I see my job as balancing valid, but competing, needs. That's my focus." If that creates an opening for an argument, it's OK to have the discussion. Saying no shouldn't be a monologue.



Work Smarter with the Gamonnet Method

Outlook, Notes, Google Enterprise, Mind Mapping, Office 365, Sharepoint

Stick with it. If you have a good reason for saying no, stay with it. For example, I knew a young woman who went into mediation over a faulty used car that she'd just bought. The person who sold her the car was a volatile counterpart who gave many reasons why he shouldn't be responsible for returning the woman's money or repairing the car. The young woman listened, and to each argument she replied, "I understand. In [this state] the seller is responsible for repairing or refunding the cost of a car that cannot pass inspection." In the end, the seller paid, and even took the young woman out for lunch.

Be realistic. People hoping to preserve a relationship often want to both say no *and* have their counterpart be happy. But the realistic response to hearing no is often anger, unhappiness, or concern. If we distort our message in trying for an unrealistic response, our counterpart is likely to miss the point and we will have to say no twice.

Saying NO neutrally doesn't necessarily come naturally. To get better at it, practice ahead of time with someone who will push back. Eventually, it'll become easier to say yes to saying NO – without destroying important relationships.

