

The No Repertoire

1) The awkward pause.

Instead of being controlled by the threat of awkwardness, own it. When a request comes to you just pause for a moment. Count to three before delivering your verdict. Or if you get a bit bolder simply wait for the other person to fill the silence.

2) The soft no (or the “no but”).

Instead of delivering a direct no, say no and offer an alternative.

“Thank you for the invitation, but I am in the middle of a really big project. But I would love to get together once this is finished. Let me know if we can get together next week.”

3) “Let me check my calendar and get back to you.”

This gives you time to pause and reflect and ultimately reply that you are regretfully unavailable. It enables you to take back control of your decisions rather than be rushed into a yes.

4) Use email bouncebacks.

Why limit these to vacations and holidays? You can set up an auto-response whenever you are busy with an important project, whether that be at work or at home. People will adapt to your temporary absence and non-responsiveness just fine.

5) Say, “Yes. What should I deprioritize?”

Saying no to a boss or superior can be difficult. But saying yes to every request can compromise your ability to meet higher priority commitments. One effective way to do that is to remind your superior what you would be neglecting if you said yes and force them to grapple with the tradeoff.

6) Say it with humor.

Humor can soften a no. Perhaps someone asks you to do something you really aren't interested in doing. Your response could be a simple, “Nope!” This direct honesty can insert a little humor and remove the awkwardness.

7) Use the phrase, “You are welcome to X. I am willing to Y.”

“You're welcome to borrow my car. I'm willing to make sure the keys are here for you.” By this, you are also saying, “I won't be able to drive you.” You are saying what you will not do but you are couching it in terms of what you are willing to do.

8) I can't do it, but X might be interested.

It is tempting to think that our help is uniquely invaluable but often, people requesting something don't really care if it's us who helps them – as long as they get the help.