

The Importance of Learning to Say “No”

by Jeff Davidson

01/02/2014



Human Resources 
a division of IQPC

There is a direct relationship between the size of your organization and the number of requests you receive to attend or support functions. On the personal side, with your uncle's retirement party, your friend's baby shower, your aunt's 54th birthday party, and next week's field hockey game, it would be easy for you to fill up your calendar and never get your job done, or accomplish things you want to do in life.

You don't need to bone up on volumes of etiquette to be able to say no gracefully. If you simply learn a few of the following approaches, you'll be in great shape:

- The easiest technique to decline a request is to say that your child's birthday/recital/graduation/other important event will be occurring at that time, and you couldn't possibly miss it.
- Closely related is anything that your "family" has planned. For example, "That's the day our family is taking our annual fall trip to Goa. We've been planning it for months, and the hotel reservations have already been made. I do appreciate your asking."
- You may be able to work up enough gumption to say, "I'd like to, but I'm over-committed right now; I really couldn't work it in and do it justice... or be fully attentive... or offer the level of support that I know you'd appreciate."
- "I wish you had asked me a couple of days ago, I already committed that time to helping XYZ accomplish ABC."
- "Could I take a raincheck? I've been working myself crazy lately and I've scheduled that time to be with my... therapist... masseuse...spouse... family."
- "Let me get back to you by tomorrow." Tomorrow, use the aforementioned phone, mail, email, or text message to politely decline.
- If you can say it without blinking, a gently worded, "Thanks, but I'll have to pass," works well.

Reducing the Info-Glut

So much competes for your time and attention, with your tough boss, overfilled calendar, and future commitments, that it's easy to be caught off guard. Others can and will hit you with more, and it will compete for your attention. Without thinking, do you add your name to mailing lists, surrendering yourself to more data and deluge? Having too much to respond to results in exhaustion, with no sense of control over your time.

Here is a checklist for handling magazine subscriptions:

- As each of your magazines subscriptions expire, don't immediately renew. Wait a period of two to three months to see if you miss the magazine. If you don't, you've saved some money and a whole lot of time. You can always view several issues at a local library. Recognize that in a society in which information flows abundantly, no particular magazine (unless it's highly specialized) is that crucial to receive.
- If you do miss it, re-subscribe. The publication will take you back; in many cases, you'll even get a better rate.
- For the magazines you do receive, immediately strip them down. Tear out or photocopy only those articles or passages of interest to you and recycle the rest.
- One of the benefits of having an online service is the ability to quickly peruse articles from dozens of publications, download, save them and read them at will – without ever having to handle paper. After reading them, you can choose to delete or keep them. Either way, you avoid glutting your physical systems – filing cabinets, desk drawers, and file folders.

- For those publications you continue to subscribe to, experiment with giving away every second or third issue. Chemists, engineers, and highly technical types agree that they could skip every third issue of their technical publications and be no worse off because of the built-in redundancy in all periodicals.
- Many magazines publish a roster of the articles that were run during the year in their final publication – either their December issue, or their last week of December issue. Such indexes can be invaluable, since you can then highlight exactly which articles you would like to see.
- Some publications maintain a readers' service, whereby you can order the articles you desire and not the entire issue.

Getting Off and Staying Off of Mailing Lists

By extending the principles of reducing your magazine glut to your mail, you can save even more time.

- When you are besieged by mail from repeat or gross offenders, and such offenders have included a self-addressed bulk mail reply envelope, use the envelope to request that your name be removed and review their literature, or see if there is a phone number you can use to make such a request at no cost.
- Sometimes the fastest way to deal with repeat offenders is to write "speed reply" on the communication you've received. Underneath those words write the message, "Please remove me from your mailing list now and forever." Sign your name, date it, and send back the very items or communication that you received. Be sure to address it to the mailing list manager of the offending organization.
- At all times and in all places, inform the parties with whom you do business that you do not appreciate having your name added to a mailing list, being inundated by catalogs, announcements, brochures, and fliers. This is necessary if you place an order by fax, make a purchase by credit card, fill out a magazine subscription form, or procure any other type of good or service other than by cash.

The less unwanted mail you receive, the more time you have in your life!