



“NO” is a Complete Sentence ***Establishing Personal Boundaries***

How many times have you said “yes,” “sure,” or “no problem” to some request only to immediately regret your response?

You find yourself committed to giving your time, effort, money, or energy to something you have little or no desire to participate in. Oftentimes we are caught off guard with various requests from people – well-intended people - and we feel the urge to immediately say “yes” in compliance. This only leads to anguish, remorse and stress. Each time you agree when you don’t want to, you give up a piece of yourself. This can lead to feelings of powerlessness because you are in another person’s grip, fulfilling her wishes or meeting his needs and not your own.

Learning to say “No” is a learned skill. If you are a master of *yes* and a novice of *no*, the process of learning how to change can seem distressing and cause anxiety. While saying no probably won’t change your personality, it will help you assert yourself. It could even put an end to that empty feeling in the pit of your stomach when you commit beyond your stamina or to the point of draining your emotional nerves. A calmer life, under your own supervision, will result.

Here are some questions to ask yourself to assess your comfort in establishing personal boundaries, and 5 steps in being able to say no with ease:

5 Steps in Learning To Say “No”

Step 1 – Make a list of your “yes’s”

Just as you would track your spending for budget purposes, track how many times you say *yes* during any given week. Make a list of the occasions you agreed to various requests. If you are a *yes* person, the amount may shock you! What is your reaction? Are you surprised or is it confirming that you have lost control of your choices? Being aware of the habit of people pleasing is the first step in making the desired changes for personal empowerment.

Step 2 – Know how you are spending your time

Once you know how often you agree with others, it will become clear how you are spending your time. Is one particular person or activity monopolizing the majority of your time? Has this left little room left over for your own enjoyment? Well-managed time means there is room in your schedule for your enjoyment and your desires also.

Step 3 – Get your priorities straight

If you don't know what is important to you - what you value most – how can you possibly make the best choices about what to say *no* to and what to say *yes* to? Your values, beliefs and priorities should be demonstrated in your actions and your choices. This is not to say we will love everything we need to do. Even though not all tasks are joyful, contributing to the success of your family or your workplace often reflects values you do hold dear, such as harmony or productivity. Once you get your priorities straight, saying “no” becomes easier, and your “yes’s” have much more power.

Step 4 – Give some control to others

Many times we agree to take on more than we can because we enjoy being in control. Or we may feel someone else cannot complete a given project as well. When you are able to trust other people you will feel the ease in giving over some control. Delegating can free more than your time. Eliminating the need to be in charge relieves much pressure on you. It can free your energy and improve your attitude.

Step 5 – Identify your boundaries

A boundary is a limit on how far you can go with comfort, both emotionally and physically. A boundary is a present and clear limit. It is individual and is set by you. It supports your roles and allows you to be real. Once you identify your boundaries, it will become clear what kind of requests make you uncomfortable. How much of other people's problems or requests can you tolerate without being drained? A boundary is not about being controlling or manipulating. It is not an all-or-nothing position, but rather it allows for some flexibility.

Believe it or not, “No” is a complete sentence – and it's okay to say it whenever you need to, without fear or guilt. Establishing and maintaining personal boundaries is not something that is *against* another person. It is *for* you.

By following these five steps mentioned, you will begin to develop new habits - habits that will ignite your self-confidence and free your inner strength. You will be able to feel good about your decision to say no and a greater sense of personal freedom and reduced stress will result!

About Centerstone

Centerstone (www.centerstone.org), celebrating 50 years of service in 2006, is the largest behavioral healthcare provider in Tennessee and the ninth largest in the nation. A not-for-profit organization, Centerstone provides a full range of behavioral health and related educational services to individuals of all ages and their families. Centerstone is devoted to research that seeks to identify, treat and eliminate mental illness. Each year, the organization provides services to more than 50,000 individuals. Children, adolescents, adults, seniors, and families all receive help from a multitude of different programs at more than 65 facilities and 140 partnership locations throughout the region. For more information about Centerstone, please call (615) 460-4357 or toll free at (888) 291-4357.

About Susan Gillpatrick, MEd, LPC, CTS

Susan Gillpatrick, Centerstone Crisis Management Specialist, primarily works in the field with clients in critical incident response situations, and in Centerstone's wellness trainings and presentations. She is also responsible for planning and implementing marketing and growth strategies for Centerstone's Crisis Management Strategies.

In recent years, Ms. Gillpatrick worked for the Shelby County Government Victims Assistance Center in Memphis. There, she co-developed a model program for the state of Tennessee entitled, "Homicide Response." Her work in this area received the 2000 Achievement Award from the National Association of Counties.

Ms. Gillpatrick is a Licensed Professional Counselor, Certified Trauma Specialist, Certified Workplace Conflict Mediator, and Mental Health Service Provider in the state of Tennessee and a National Certified Counselor. She is also a member the American Counseling Association, the Association of Traumatic Stress Specialists, the Tennessee Mental Health Counseling Association, and the Middle Tennessee Employee Assistance Professionals Association. She is a frequent presenter at local and national conferences, and has had numerous articles published. She received her Master of Education degree in Human Development Counseling from Peabody College at Vanderbilt University.

For more information about regaining control of your life through personal counseling, contact Centerstone at (615) 460-4357. To request Susan Gillpatrick to speak with your group or organization about complete wellness in living, contact her at (615) 460-4445 or susan.gillpatrick@centerstone.org.