

The art of saying 'no'

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We are planning to go paintballing next Saturday. Are you, in principle, up for it?

If your immediate response is always 'yeah, yeah, yeah, sure, take a moment. Say: "Can I get back to you on that one?"; "Let me have a think.' Just buy yourself time. Most people don't mind. By the time you have decided it's a "no", the message will have already got through that you're not keen, and it won't feel so 1) _____. You might worry that if you turn down a group activity that they're all going to 2) _____ you off when you're not there: definitely, if they think you're lying, or you're known for 3) _____ out at the last minute, they will be 4) _____ you off. But if you're straightforward, there's not much to say except: "X is always being clear about his/her needs and preferences, in a timely manner."

Your boss: Will you take on this new project (you don't have time for)?

You need to set a boundary but you don't want to look unwilling. The first thing you need to say is: "Thank you so much for the opportunity." Then you just need to 5) _____ out what it would mean: "I'm going to have to postpone project X, which was important to the client. So, which one would you like me to prioritise?" It's more stressful at work because there's a formal chain of command, and the expectation is that you'll say "yes". But this is the case when you have to practise saying "no", because it's less emotionally charged. What you're doing strategically is trying to unnerve the boss, while staying 6) _____.

Your doctor: I'm about to perform a medical examination of an intimate nature; do you mind if five student-doctors come and watch?

Many people feel 7) _____ by the medical profession, and others feel they have a civic duty to be guinea pigs, since how else are students supposed to learn? Yet having an audience in any kind of medical examination is not the same as 8) _____ from honking a learner driver, and there are any number of reasons why you might not want that. Just think: there are other patients, many of whom won't mind at all. It's your body and your choice, after all!

