

# ✓ LESS IS BETTER: LEARNING TO SAY NO ✗

## Before reading

1. How do you manage your daily tasks at work? Use these pictures to talk about your duties and responsibilities.



## 2. Match the pictures with these phrases from the box.

meet a deadline - make a presentation - have/attend a meeting  
check social media - read/answer emails - make a to-do list

### While reading

**1. How do you respond to the endless demands? Read both texts, adapted from an article written by Steve Cunningham. Then discuss the questions below with your classmates / teacher.**

#### Group 1

People that try to do it all. Everything on their to-do list is important, and they find ways to **fit** everything **in**. They say yes a lot, because successful people always find a way to get it all done. Sometimes they **take on** too much and tend to feel out of control, but who doesn't these days?

#### Group 2

People who think that less is better. Only a few things on their to-do list really matter, and everything else can wait, or maybe even never get done. They find themselves saying no a lot, which doesn't make them all that popular. But they feel in control, and seem to enjoy their work.

a. Which group do you most identify with? Why?

b. Match these kinds of people, addressed by the writer Greg McKeown in his book "Essentialism", with groups **1** and **2**. Explain your choices.

Essentialists



Non-Essentialists



**2. Decide whether these sentences describe Essentialists or Non-essentialists' viewpoints.**

a. It's more important to make significant progress in a few things rather than making a millimetre of progress in a million directions.

- b. Focus and productivity mean saying yes to everything.
- c. They focus all of their energy and time on the things that truly matter.
- d. Saying no is not an option.

## 5. Essentialists are good at saying no.

Brainstorm some ways to say no politely. Discuss them with your teacher.

## 6. Read the eight responses McKeown suggests in his book "Essentialists."



**Say "no" to the unimportant... Say "yes" to the vital.**



1. \_\_\_\_\_ People hate silence, and if you pause long enough after somebody requests something of you, they'll find a reason to **withdraw their request**.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ Use this in situations where you don't want to **take on a task** now, but would consider it in the future. Most times you won't hear about this request again.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ This **gets you off the hook** for responding immediately, and if it's something that you ultimately don't want to do, you can simply say that unfortunately, you're not available.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ If you are really courageous, you could set it up, letting people know that you aren't available to respond to email for a period of time.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ This works especially well when receiving requests from superiors. By letting your boss or teammate know that you'll have to drop something else in order to get their request done, they'll frequently move on to somebody else who can **squeeze the task into their schedule**.
6. \_\_\_\_\_ This one is difficult to **pull off** well, but it's a good way to **diffuse** a potentially uncomfortable situation.

7. \_\_\_\_\_ Imagine a friend asks to borrow your car. You say "you are welcome to borrow my car, and I'm **willing to** make sure the keys are here for you." This way, you let your friend know that he is able to take the car, if he/she is willing to pick it up.
8. \_\_\_\_\_ It's much easier to say "I can't do it, but X might be interested" than it is to **reject their request** outright. You are able to **come off as** being helpful, without having to do the task for yourself.

## After reading



### **7. Match the texts (1-8) with the headlines (a-h).**

- a. Use the "you are welcome to X. I am willing to Y" response.
- b. Use the "yes, what should I reprioritize" method.
- c. Use an awkward pause.
- d. Use the "let me check my calendar and get back to you" method.
- e. Use a "no but".
- f. Use an email autoresponder.
- g. Use a bit of humour.
- h. Suggest somebody else to do it.

### **8. Which of the eight suggestions would / wouldn't work for you?**

**I'd like to try it out**

**I already do it**

**I wouldn't do it**

## 9. Complete these questions with the verbs and phrases in the correct form from the box.



Tip! You can read them in contextualized examples along the lesson!

**to fit .... in / to squeeze.... into**

**to take on - to withdraw - to get somebody off the hook**

**to pull off - to diffuse - willing to - to come off as**

- a. Are you \_\_\_\_\_ try out some of McKeown's suggestions at work?
- b. How do you feel when you say no and \_\_\_\_\_ a request?
- c. How would you manage to \_\_\_\_\_ all the tasks \_\_\_\_\_ your schedule?
- d. Are you eager to \_\_\_\_\_ more responsibilities?
- e. Have you ever \_\_\_\_\_ a difficult negotiation, i.e. accomplished successfully?
- f. Are you capable of \_\_\_\_\_ an uncomfortable situation at work?
- g. If you said no too often, would you be afraid of \_\_\_\_\_ being rude or selfish?
- h. Would you use humor to \_\_\_\_\_ you \_\_\_\_\_? Do you think it'd work?

## 10. Discuss the questions in exercise 9 with your teacher.