



Tips for Saying 'No'

1. Keep it short and simple – don't waffle.

Example:

Your Manager says: "I'd like you to work until 6.30pm on Thursday".

Good response: "I can't work late on Thursday" *This makes it clear that you will not be able to work late.*

Poor response: "Oh, Thursday's really difficult for me. If it were any other day...you see I have to take my children to their swimming lessons...I'll see if anyone else can do it, but I wouldn't count on it..." *This gives the impression that it can be arranged.*

2. State how you feel – take ownership

Example:

Your manager says: "Ask Julie to do it".

Good response: "I don't want to as I think that's unfair given her limited experience and the tight deadlines involved". *This makes it clear why you are saying no.*

Poor response: "I'd rather ask someone else". *This could imply that there is a problem with Julie's performance*

3. Give a reason – avoid excessive explanations

Example:

Your client says: "Can you send that over straight away?"

Good response: "No, I'm going to be in a meeting until 3.00pm". *This clearly outlines why you are refusing*

Poor response: "No, I can't". *This could seem rude.*

4. Don't over-apologise – once is enough, if it is necessary at all

Example:

Your manager says: "I need you to go to London on Sunday night for a meeting first thing of Monday morning".

Good response: "I can't go on Sunday as I have family commitments". *This focuses on the facts, and illustrates a professional approach.*

Poor response: "I'm really sorry, any day but Sunday...we have a family party, and my sister would be so upset if I wasn't there, and I'm helping with the catering, I'm so sorry, if there's any other day..." *This implies that you would like to attend the meeting, and would be willing to alter your arrangements, but you don't want to upset others.*



5. Suggest an alternative – offer other solutions

Example:

Your client says: “Please bring the final version to the meeting on Thursday”.

Good response: “I can’t as it is being checked by audit on Friday morning. However, I can bring the final draft version to you...it is unlikely there will be significant changes.” *This recognises the needs of the other person, and offers a reasonable alternative.*

Poor response: “I can’t as I won’t have it until Friday.” *This could just appear obstructive*

6. Actively Listen – show respect

Example:

Your client says: “I need to meet with you this week to agree the final version”.

Good response: “I understand that meeting is ideal, however, my diary is full this week. We can either meet next week, or go through the changes on the phone.” *This acknowledges the deadline, and the preference for a meeting. The alternatives suggested allow the person making the request to decide which is more important: deadline or face to face contact.*

Poor response: “We can do it next week if you like?” *This response disregards the needs of the other person and shows a lack of listening.*

7. Be honest – with yourself and with others

Example:

Your manager says: “Please make this your top priority

Good response: “I agree it is important, however I have promised to compile the figures for uploading by 10.00, so I need to finish that first.” *This shows an understanding of the situation, but manages the expectations of the requester, outlining what will be done and when.*

Poor response: “I’m supposed to get the figures updated on to the computer by 10.00, so I’m going to be a bit stretched.” *This response is likely to lead to stress, and failure on both tasks.*

8. Remain firm – but empathetic

Example:

Your manager says: “I need you to double-check all the figures now.”

Good response: “I understand your need to be confident in the figures before your meeting tomorrow, but I don’t have the time right now. If you allow me to miss the internal meeting, I can do it this afternoon”. *This demonstrates empathy and offers a workable compromise.*

Poor response: “Can’t you wait until tomorrow? I’m really busy!” *This is aggressive and could result in conflict.*