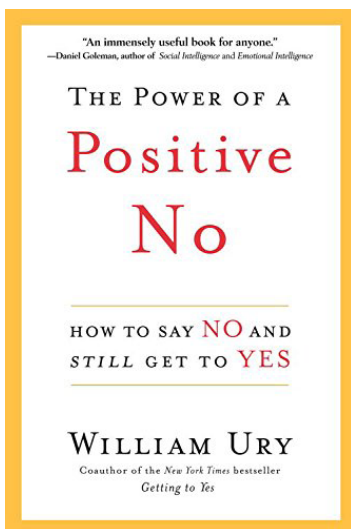


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William Ury, a prolific author and negotiation expert, empowers individuals to navigate life's challenges, from familial disputes to corporate conflicts, offering practical insights for saying No and still getting to Yes.

The Power of a Positive No

THE NUTSHELL

Bantam 2007

Every day, we face situations demanding us to say “No” without damaging relationships. From refusing a child’s request for a new toy to handling work demands or addressing inappropriate behavior, saying “No” gracefully is a universal challenge.

Saying “No” is a process of asserting your interests while respecting others. It starts with a “Yes” to your core needs, followed by a firm “No” to an unwanted request, and ends with another “Yes,” seeking constructive solutions.

The first stage involves uncovering our Yes, empowering our No, and fostering an attitude of respect towards the other person. In the process of delivering a Positive No, the key lies in shifting our approach from starting with a “No” to beginning with a “Yes.” Instead of opposing the other person’s demands or behavior outright, we should anchor our refusal in our own core interests and what truly matters to us.

Once we’ve uncovered this deeper Yes, we must say No confidently. The other person may react strongly, and we need the strength to stand our ground. This involves creating a Plan B, a practical strategy that safeguards our core interests if the other party refuses to respect our No. While negative power seeks to punish the other, positive power aims to protect and advance our own needs.

The Power of a Positive No

Having prepared ourselves to say No effectively, the next step is to prepare the other person to accept our refusal positively. We must create a channel of communication that allows them to perceive our No as a positive stance rather than a rejection. This involves offering respect to the other person, treating them with dignity, listening to them, and acknowledging their humanity.

Effective preparation and practice are essential before we actually deliver our Positive No. As Muhammad Ali, the boxing champ, wisely said, “I run on the road long before I dance under the lights.” Now, we are ready to move on to the second stage of the process.

Delivering a Positive No is the second step which begins with a clear affirmation (Yes), then establishing a firm limit (No), and concluding with a constructive proposal (Yes).

To deliver your initial Yes effectively, you have three tools at your disposal: the-statements that present facts, I-statements that clarify your interests and needs, and we-statements that invoke shared interests or standards. It’s essential to address the problem, not attack the person, maintaining a respectful tone.

Your No sets a clear boundary and limit, but it should flow naturally from your Yes, maintaining a matter of fact and neutral tone. In a Positive No, you seek to stay connected with the other person through respect, using your No to protect your interests without causing harm or rejection.

After asserting your No, the third element is proposing a positive outcome (Yes). Many people make the mistake of stopping at No without suggesting an alternative. A positive proposal demonstrates respect for the other person’s needs and makes it more likely for them to accept your No. This proposal should be clear, feasible, positively framed, and respectful.

After delivering a Positive No, the work isn’t done. Dealing with the other person’s reaction to your No and guiding them toward accepting your proposal is the next challenge. To follow through on your Yes, it’s important to stay true to your underlying Yes.

Understand that the other person may need time to process your No. Saying No can be like delivering bad news, and people typically go through stages like avoidance, denial, anxiety, anger, bargaining, sadness, and acceptance when hearing bad news. While you can’t control their emotions, you can help them navigate these stages and eventually accept your No by controlling your own reactions.

If the other person still refuses to accept your No, you can underscore it without resorting to submission or conflict. Underscoring means emphasizing patiently and persistently that No means No while maintaining a positive intention and using your Plan B as a last resort.

Once they accept your No, it’s time to negotiate an agreement that protects your core interests while also considering theirs. The goal is a positive outcome, which can take various forms, such as an agreement that satisfies both parties’ interests, a healthy relationship, or an amicable separation.

Negotiating to Yes is the final step, where you aim to reach a positive outcome that aligns with your core interests. This process may involve not only reaching an agreement but also gaining approval from relevant parties in the other person’s circle. Ending on a positive note is as crucial as starting on one, as it leaves a lasting impression.

The Power of a Positive No

Delivering a Positive No demands courage, empathy, and persistence, but its rewards are substantial. By combining No with Yes, we can improve our lives and create a better world based on integrity and mutual respect. You don't have to choose between saying No and getting to Yes; you can do both.

You can assertively say No while maintaining a positive approach.