# The art of saying no

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I'VE had a number of conversations with people recently who are overloaded with various things (in both their working life and personal life) and feel like they can't possibly get through everything they have to do. Sometimes we find ourselves taking on more responsibility, often because we just can't say no to things:

*'Not saying no often enough is one of the biggest causes of being too busy'*
**(Maggio, 2009)**

Many people in our profession hit this problem – we want to help people so it's against our nature to say no to things. Sometimes though, it's necessary to do so in order to look after ourselves. So what can we do to prevent feeling overloaded, whilst also avoiding the guilt of not being able to do something?

**Knowing when to say no**
When I was new to the LIS profession, I wasn't sure what I wanted to focus on. So I tried as many different things as I could. I got involved in different projects and did lots of things outside the core part of my job roles. That was manageable for a few years, but as I began to take on more responsibility both in and outside my job it got too much. I found that a large proportion of my free time was taken up with these extra activities (to the detriment of other parts of my life) and some of them were things I no longer enjoyed as much as I had in the beginning. It was time to take stock and work out my priorities.

I stopped taking on new things for a while, and tried to figure out which things I was no longer passionate about and which I really was. Once I'd figured out what I should focus on, I made sure to only take on new things if the answer to each of the following questions is yes:

**1** Will it help me develop new skills or work towards my goals?

**2** Is it something I can realistically bring skills/experience to or would someone else be better placed to do it?

## Getting things done

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Remember that saying no is much more polite than saying yes and not fulfilling your commitment.

**3** Is it something I'm interested in?

**4** Do I have time to commit to the activity?

Time is often the crucial factor, and why sometimes I have to say no (or not yet) to things I'd really love to do.

I use these basic questions for helping me make decisions about large and small things – it could be a committee position, a conference presentation, helping a friend, or a simple task at work. Don't be afraid to say no, or that you can't do it at the moment – the requester will appreciate your honesty and often it can lead to an increased respect for your time.

**How do you say no?**
Actually saying no can, for some people, be even more difficult than making the decision to say no. I follow some general rules:

● If your decision will take time, let the person know you'll get back to them, but want to spend time making the right decision

● Be honest about your decision and the reasons behind it (though be careful to avoid causing offence by making it clear it's the task you are saying no to, not the person)

● If appropriate, offer an alternative option – perhaps you're interested but can't commit to the suggested timescale, or would like to change the scope slightly

● If you know someone else who may be suitable, make a recommendation.

Saying no can be really hard, especially if you're used to saying yes to helping everyone out, but remember that saying no is much more polite than saying yes and not fulfilling your commitment. There are some useful tips in the following blog posts: http://bitly.com/bundles/joeyanne/5

**New productivity tools**
If you need a to-do list that you can use as a team (e.g. to assign tasks to people), I'd recommend following the Wunderlist blog (http://www.6wunderkinder.com/blog) as they will soon be launching Wunderlist Pro to support this functionality. The subscription will be €4.49/month, and if the system is anything like their current (free) offering, I'm sure it will be popular. **[U]**