

**The Power of A Positive No –**  
**HOW TO SAY NO AND STILL GET TO YES**

By William Ury  
Bantam Books

William Ury takes the reader on an exploration of the many uses and misuses of the word, “NO.” He states that on the one hand the word is the most needed word in our language today, and on the other hand, NO has the potential of being the most destructive word we could utter. He labels the negative applications of NO as those that accommodate, attack, avoid, or become a combination of all three, and he explains how the reader can transform these negatives into positives.

Ury discusses why people misuse NO, and the detrimental effect it has on those who find NO too difficult or even impossible to say. He then continues to explain the positive NO which begins with a YES! continues with a NO. And ends with a YES?

Simply put, Ury believes that YES and NO must be married or combined to form a positive rather than negative message. The beginning YES is a yes to the individual’s interests. George owns a business and is a family man. He is active in his community. Someone asks George to serve on a committee that will take him away from activities he has promised to do with his family. The person making the request (or demand) is a valuable customer which makes it difficult or seemingly impossible for George to refuse. However, if the person making the request is accommodated, it will cause George’s other commitments to be neglected. This may result in George doing something he really does not want to do, feeling resentment and dissatisfaction, or doing a poor job of trying to satisfy the request– perhaps all three.

When you are faced with a situation like George’s, Ury’s solution to the dilemma of deciding whether to say YES or NO is to first determine your interests. When your interests are in conflict with the request, say Yes to your interests while saying NO to that particular request. The final YES? may be an alternative or suggestion that would solve the requesting person’s problem but would not commit you to something that you do not want to do or perhaps should not do. An example of a positive NO response would be, “I have made a commitment on that date, so I will not be available to help you. Perhaps John could help, or maybe you could change the date, and we could do this another time?”

Drawing on his experiences as a negotiator as well as the experiences of wide range of other people including hostage negotiators, parents, union officials, company CEO’s, employees, and political leaders, Ury gives many examples of how individuals are able to say NO in a positive nondestructive manner that cannot only preserve relationships but can improve and strengthen ties between the person saying NO and the person who is the target of the response.

Stressing the need for respect when delivering a NO, Ury suggests that respect is given for your sake not for the sake of the other person, “Respect is an expression of yourself and your values.” Using Winston Churchill as an example, the author describes how Churchill signed a letter containing a declaration of war on Japan, “I have the honor to be, with high consideration, Sir, Your obedient servant, Winston S. Churchill.” When criticized for his style, Churchill responded, “But after all, when you have to kill a man, it costs nothing to be polite.”

The last lines in this book sum up Ury quite well and quite simply, “In closing, I wish you the kind of success that can come only from being true to yourself and respectful to others!” The Power of A Positive No is what Ury considers the last of a trilogy consisting of this book, Getting to Yes, and Getting Past No. All three books have something to offer the person who is concerned with interest-based negotiation. A Positive No is especially valuable for those who, for whatever reason, have never learned to say NO or view all NOs as negative communications.

Review by Sherrie R. Abney