

INSIGHT

SAYING YES, FEELING NO

Agreeing for all the wrong reasons can be hazardous to your health.

By Doug McCarthy

There was a time in my life when I believed that to improve and be successful, it was important to say “yes” to every significant challenge, opportunity and request. The thinking was that self-improvement and advancement were only available to those who made things happen in life.

Even today, some self-improvement gurus put greater emphasis on grabbing hold of all opportunities and only giving a token nod to a balanced lifestyle. The outcome can be high stress levels caused by long to-do lists and a calendar crammed with deadlines and obligations.

According to an article by the Mayo Clinic (mayoclinic.org), the answer for stress relief may be as simple as saying “no.” If we are inclined to say “yes” when we are feeling “no,” we must give ourselves time to examine our motives and determine what is really best.

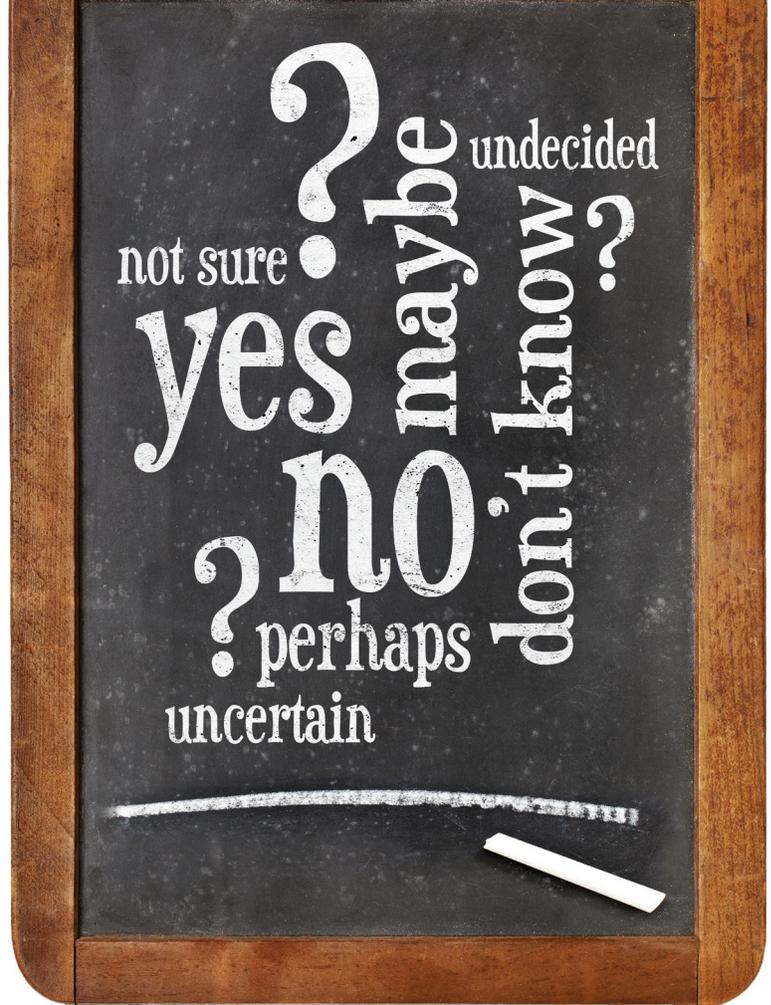
Here are some questions we can ask as part of that examination:

• **Are we saying “yes” because we want to please others?**

In her book, *The Tyranny of Niceness*, Evelyn Sommers writes: “Saying ‘yes’ to something when you would prefer to say ‘no’ means that you are complying with the wishes of others with some cost to your integrity.” As a result, not only do we feel the stress of having taken on another task, we experience an eroding of our sense of self.

• **Do we avoid saying “no” because it might seem selfish?**

If we already have a reasonable list of commitments, it is better to leave ourselves with the time and energy to honour existing obligations.



• **Does saying “no” sound too harsh or direct?**

Giving qualified answers, such as “I don’t know if I should,” can be misinterpreted. Explanations can end up in a discussion that ends with you saying “yes.” Saying the word “no” is very clear!

• **Is our health suffering because we are overcommitted?**

If so, then no one benefits, and our self-improvement and advancement goals are in jeopardy.

If we say “yes” and feel “no,” we should avoid responding right away. We have to give ourselves time to think, to sort things out, or to get advice from others. Once we have done so, we can be honest with ourselves and in our response to others.

Of course, self-examination must also be applied if the reverse happens: If we say “no,” and feel “yes.” The wisdom comes from understanding what is best for us at this time and in this place.

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