

No

**“A shortcut to
assertiveness”**

By

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Introduction

“No” is a powerful word. No wonder it can be hard to say it. Conversely, “yes”, as the easier option, can cause untold misery and damage when it is mishandled. Essentially, the fleeting ease of saying the latter, is sometimes gambled against its potential for causing pain and/or damage. However, our increasing age and experience helps us to avoid saying “yes” when we had meant “no”, because the past dictates gambling may not be wise.

I respectfully suggest you start saying “no”, even when it is difficult, because it is your right, and the feelings that might be stopping you from doing so, are not of your making. Reasons for ignoring or questioning such feelings follow. Just because they make you feel unreasonable

now, does not mean you should keep trusting those feelings. The more you view choice as a right, the easier expressing your choice will become, and therefore the more assertive you might be.

Exceptions

Before elaborating, it is not always sensible to say “no”. For example, if your boss requests that you do a broadly reasonable task within your scope, then you would not want to refuse it, without being confident that your resignation and survival, would be significantly worse to your boss, than their granting of your concession and career continuity.

The military is a different matter again. Military training centres around dogged adherence to orders, in a rank hierarchy. Understandably, in intense war zones the consideration of commands is not

workable, but only slavish obedience is relevant.

In St Matthew's Gospel (5:37) of the KJV, the Bible records Jesus as having said, "but let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil."

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If making choices between "yes" and "no" were only intellectual, and without consequences to others, they would be much easier to make. The point is that feelings are often involved. The rest of this essay examines a few common related feelings, and why you might favour logic over them.

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Assertiveness

Part of state schooling involved being given a command and then being obliging. A nurturing, private school aspect, was not possible in comprehensive schools. When the competitive nature of exams, tests, and sports, etc., get added, a capitalistic foundation was complete. I had only one teacher whose scope was broader. She would regularly find a small reason to put the entire class into detention. It would usually be over a minor transgression of one person. After school we would queue, whilst waiting for this teacher to never arrive. Most pupils showed up, to waste ten or fifteen minutes of their lives. After which they felt they could risk heading home, late.

Childhood experiences can strongly affect our choice making abilities. By growing up

in a loving home it is more likely that we will have self-worth. In that case, when we are faced with dilemmas, we are less likely to make choices based on perceived increases in an external self-worth, or what other people think about us. We can be more objective and less concerned with people pleasing.

Our view of ourselves must be accurate: neither too low nor too high. Humility means realising an accuracy of self, with a correspondingly suitable behaviour. It is never about being walked on, or always turning the other cheek. There have never been any perfect humans, and self-respect is not a sin. The opinion of others holds virtually no validity at all, especially since it can be in a constant flux. Therefore, our own self-opinion is the most important one, after our partner's, and a small

selection from our family, friends and colleagues.

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So, some of those feelings that hinder us from being objective, whilst we are engaged in these binary choices, include anxiety, guilt, and shame. By taking each in turn without a special order, their influences are covered below.

Anxiety is often seen as the cost borne by living in the future. In our case, it is the worry of what an acceptance of friction will mean, and where we will go. Avoidance is easier, and wiser people point blank never make it a default. Had we not gone to those school detentions, perhaps a tack of individual case consideration may have begun, rather than a military like acceptance of non-consideration. Our truer self-

representation would have surely blossomed in other ways too.

Presenting a persona at odds with reality is risky. When we are one opposite half of a decision, and face to face, and the other half is directly or indirectly threatening to reveal our “sham”, spiralling anxieties can end any hope of a favourable result for us, because more than anything, we want to feel better or more comfortable.

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Guilt might arise when past conditioning is triggered after transgressing an ancient rule; but is that logical behaviour? For example, just because children were drilled to do as they were told, is it reasonable that they never get to deviate decades later? Figuratively skipping that detention should be considered. There will *be* bogus detention metaphors, until the

lesson is learned. In fact, the expression “you can run but you can’t hide”, may be relevant. Sadly, our mental health is relevant: whilst not too hard a lesson for most, there are those who will view this as immensely complex and possibly even a menacing mind-game.

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Shame can take the form of a clash with something current, but also as a subconscious experience from the past, and outside of the scope of this essay. To illustrate it, a modern trend is for people to be quite mindlessly fixated with kindness. A younger person’s mantra is to hail, “be kind.” Bizarrely, this facilitates controlling mechanisms, and could have been introduced through totally opposite sources to what its “nice” adherents would assume. If we adopt kindness our choices

diminish. We attempt to make people feel ashamed, through highlighting that an assumed universal truth has been, or is being, transgressed, and we attempt therefore, to hold the upper hand in that way. It only works if the attitude is mutual. And it is a rather rich and western democratic one at best. However, it is more of a fad, and demonstrates how unnecessary pressures can exist, or potentially develop later, and make the vulnerable even worse off through further exploitative, or coercive mechanisms.

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A final remark

Realise that first and foremost you have rights, or at the very least, preferences. Furthermore, by projecting that idea onto others, as we automatically do to a lesser

or greater degree, you should head towards the assumption that this notion approaches universality. What should follow from that, is that people become less like barriers, and more reasonable; but also, vitally, you'll know the difference. This is straightforward and logical...

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