

EXERCISE

# Building a NO Muscle



Time: 10 – 15 minutes



Setup and materials: pencil and paper



Good For: Large Groups, Small Groups, Self-study

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## Framing:

*“Learn to say no; it will be of more use to you than to be able to read Latin.”  
Charles Spurgeon*

*When you build a NO muscle, you open up more and more choice in your life. If your typical response to any request is to say YES, and then you often find yourself overwhelmed with too much to do, or you feel resentful toward people you made promises to, this skill is for you.*

*It is easier to say NO than you might think. It just takes a little thought, and some practice. When you are in practice, you will never be caught off guard. You will give yourself time to choose, do I want to spend my time, or money, or energy fulfilling this request from this person? Or would I rather have that time for myself, or for something or someone else?*

*We may fear that people will think ill of us if we say no. What is much more common is that they accept it, understand it, and may even feel apologetic that they asked. Then they forget. People don’t keep an account about your behavior, “said no on 21st January, said no to 6th July, bad person.”*

*When I was learning this skill, I would sometimes make notes in the calendar about things I would have promised my time and energy to, but then I used my NO muscle and didn’t.*

*“Friday, 1:00 pm. No lunch with Susan.”*

*“Tuesday evening. Not in a frenzy to finish the project.”*

*When that day came up in the calendar, I would notice the activity that I had said NO to, and realize that because of my bravery in the moment when the request was made, I had given myself that time or energy.*

## Steps:

### 1. Solo 3 minutes

Write at least 20 "No" or "stalling" sentences on a sheet of paper. Make them non-specific, not an excuse or explanation, just no. "I can't help with that. Good luck, though!" "I won't be able to give any time to that, sorry." "I'm afraid I have to say no."

Stalling sentences sound like this. "Give me a day to think about it." "I have to look at my calendar. I'll get back to you."

### 2. Groups of 3, brainstorm 5 minutes

In your group, share your ideas and brainstorm others. See how short, clear, and easy you can make a NO sentence.

Also, talk together about what you want your state of NO to be. How is a NO different if it is fearful? Ashamed? Clear? Decisive?

Prepare your favorite sentences and your state, and get ready to practice.

### 3. Full group, 5 minutes,

As a group, circulate around the room as if you are at a party. As you greet people and chat with them, you will test their NO muscle. Walk up to someone, say hello, and somewhere in the conversation make a request, and get a NO. Receive a request, and give a NO. Then move on to another person.

### 4. Full group, 3 minutes

Debrief, what did you notice?

Which of the NOs maintained rapport and were courteous and reasonable? Notice the simple NOs. Notice NOs that felt too elaborate, or like an excuse.

What was it like to say NO?

What was it like to be told NO?

### 5. Ongoing practice

Practice your no sentences out loud in front of the mirror, or when you are driving, or anytime you can. Say them aloud, not just in your head. Then notice, when a request is made, how easily NO has become an option for you, and how life has opened up just a little as a result.