



talking about...

November 2011

... designing better relationships for better outcomes

An Inappropriate "Yes" ...

"One-half the troubles of this life can be traced to saying yes too quickly and not saying no soon enough."

... Josh Billings (1818-1885) US writer

How many requests do you get each day? Unless you spend your time by yourself and not communicating with anyone else, the chance is that you get a lot.

Requests are the building blocks of the promises we make. As we have seen in previous newsletters, promises are the glue that holds a society together. If promises are important and requests initiate promises, then it makes sense to know how to effectively respond to a request and the implications associated with that response.

Although, we can define four legitimate responses to a request, here I only want to deal with two. Saying "yes" and saying "no". For many, the most obvious response to a request is to say, "yes". All well and good, but what if you are saying "yes" because you feel you cannot say, "no". This might sound a strange thing to say, but it happens frequently and has significant implications for relationships and performance.

Many people feel they cannot say "no" to their boss or other senior people in an organisation. Many organisational cultures, particularly more aggressive ones, create an expectation that people will always say "yes" when asked to do something. To do otherwise elicits an unpleasant response from the requestor.

Another example revolves around people who say "yes" because they would feel guilty saying "no" even though they do not want to do something or believe they cannot achieve what they are being asked to do. They say "yes" to assuage their guilt.

The culture of some countries instil in people a predisposition to say "yes". This may be to save face or simply to not upset the requestor.

Indeed there are many circumstances where people say "yes" when they would prefer to say "no".

However the upshot of someone saying "yes" when a more appropriate response is to say "no" or negotiate the request can have a significant impact on their performance and relationships. The worst case scenario here is where people say "yes" knowing they are unlikely to be able to deliver their promise or even intending not to deliver their promise.

Think about what that means. If you make a promise to me, I act as though what you have promised will occur in the agreed time frame. I do not go and ask other people to do the same thing. I assume it will be done by you. Even though you may avoid the unpleasantness of saying

"no" now, you will almost certainly have to face a more unpleasant conversation later if you do not complete your promise. Even worse, the requestor may not even come back to you and undermine you in less obvious ways. For example they may speak ill to other people about you or they may begin to micro-manage you more in the future.

Alternatively, you may attempt to do what you have committed to do, leading to taking on too much and the inevitable stress that comes with this.

There is much more to an inappropriate "yes" than may appear at first glance. Next time you hear yourself saying "yes" when it may be more appropriate to not do so, stop and consider your options. It may just save you some heartache and pain.

"The world is divided into two categories: failures and unknowns."

... Francis Picabia (1879-1953)
French painter and illustrator

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Talking About Pty Ltd

PO Box 6652,
St Kilda Rd Central,
Victoria, 8008.

Ph: +613 9504 3558

info@talkingabout.com.au
www.talkingabout.com.au



A Bit of Irish...

Thanks to Richard Payne, who sent me this one all the way from Italy ...

Paddy McCoy, an elderly Irish farmer, received a letter from the Department for Work & Pensions stating that they suspected he was not paying his employees the statutory minimum wage and they would send an inspector to interview them.

On the appointed day, the inspector turned up.

"Tell me about your staff," he asked Paddy.

"Well," said Paddy, "there's the farm hand, I pay him £240 a week, and he has a free cottage.

Then there's the housekeeper. She gets £190 a week, along with free board and lodging.

There's also the half-wit. He works a 16 hour day, does 90% of the work, earns about £25 a week along with a bottle of whisky and, as a special treat, occasionally gets to sleep with my wife."

"That's disgraceful" said the inspector, "I need to interview the half-wit."

"That'll be me then," said Paddy.

"Almost everything—all external expectations, all pride, all fear of embarrassment or failure—these things just fall away in the face of death, leaving only what is truly important. Remembering that you are going to die is the best way I know to avoid the trap of thinking you have something to lose. You are already naked. There is no reason not to follow your heart."

... Steve Jobs (1955-2011) CEO Apple & Pixar

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ACN 112 307 892
info@talkingabout.com.au
Telephone: +61 3 9504 3558

