

## Say “Yes If ...” Instead of “No Because ...”

by Mike Hawkins  
[mike@alpinelink.com](mailto:mike@alpinelink.com)



A recent study found that people with a positive outlook were one-third less likely to have a heart attack than people with a negative outlook. Not a surprise. This is consistent with many other studies as well as general psychology and neuroscience. And physical harm is just one negative consequence of being downbeat and pessimistic. In addition to our physiology, our mental health, family, social life, and

professional life suffer. Negative people tend to experience negative results while positive people tend to experience positive results.

This is not to say that people shouldn't confront reality. Of course, there are negative events that shouldn't be ignored. There are occasions when we should challenge the status quo. But regardless of circumstances, our attitude is our choice. We can choose to focus on what's wrong or we can choose to focus on addressing what's wrong. We can choose to have a can-do attitude or a can't-do one.

One way our choice of attitude manifests itself is when we are asked for help. When people ask for assistance, resources, or information, our response often reveals our attitude. Especially telling is when we respond without thought. Our immediate response generally comes from our subconscious which reveals our true nature. These *default responses* reflect our inner values, biases, and instinct. When we respond to a request so quickly that we don't think it through, our response reflects our default attitude.

Do you have a default response to people's request for help? Or to do something or go someplace? If so, what is it? If you had to narrow it down to a “yes” or “no”, which way do you typically respond? For example, if a colleague at work asks you to do something, do you typically say yes or no? If a neighbor asks to borrow something, do you typically say yes or no? If a friend or family member asks you to go on a trip, do you typically say yes or no? If you generally say no, it could be for many reasons. It could be that you are overcommitted or very busy. It could be a lack of respect for the person asking. But a default “no” response could reveal a generally negative disposition.

Regardless of why you might say no to a request, a no answer isn't generally well received. To state the obvious, if someone asks for help, they need help. They are hoping for a yes answer. They are in need of information, resource, or assistance of some kind.

If you've ever gone to a Department of Motor Vehicles to renew a license or other large institution and asked for help, there is little more frustrating than to be quickly told no. Or when you are stuck on a project and really need a colleague's help, to be told “sorry, can't help you.” In contrast, when someone says “yes, I can help you with that,” it is awesome.

## Say “Yes If ...” Instead of “No Because ...”

---

Just like any problem can be seen as an opportunity, any request for your help, can be answered two ways. You can respond to a request with either a “yes, if...” or a “no because ...” You can say yes with conditions or you can say no with reasons. The conditions and reasons are the same, but in the “yes” case, you are stating them with a can-do attitude. You are saying you can do something if certain needs are met.

In contrast, when you say no, you are projecting a can’t-do attitude. You are saying you can’t do something. You are seeing your circumstances as an obstacle rather than an opportunity. You are pointing out the negative rather than the positive. Or worse, you are making excuses for what you simply don’t want to do.

You may be thinking there isn’t anything wrong with making excuses. That excuses are good rationale for not helping someone. That excuses are a non-confrontational way of saying no. But from other’s perspectives, there is a big difference between an excuse and a reason. Excuses are usually seen for what they are—fabricated coverups. Reasons, on the other hand, are typically seen as legitimate hindrances.

Regardless of the legitimacy of your reasons, if you want to be more of a doer and helper, you can answer requests with a “yes if” rather than a “no because.” For example, if you have a colleague at work who asks you to help her create a presentation at a time when you are extremely busy, you could say “no, I’m too busy” or you could say “yes, if you could do [this] to help free up some of my time.” Or if you have a neighbor who asks you to help him build a deck in his backyard on a busy Saturday, you could say “no, I’ve got to take my lawnmower in for repair and wash my car” or you could say “yes, if you have someone who can take my lawnmower in for repair and get my car washed for me.”

The strategy of saying “yes, if [conditions]” instead of “no, because [reasons]” depends on you wanting to help others. If you don’t want to help someone, then continue using the “no” response. However, if you aspire to help others and be known more as a positive person with a can-do attitude, try changing your default response to “yes, if ...”. You might experience a real positive change in how others see you. You might find that you are much more appreciated and respected. You might find that others are more willing to help you when you need help.

---

Article written by Mike Hawkins, award-winning author of *Activating Your Ambition: A Guide to Coaching the Best Out of Yourself and Others* ([www.ActivatingYourAmbition.com](http://www.ActivatingYourAmbition.com)), author of the *SCOPE of Leadership* six-book series on coaching leaders to lead as coaches ([www.ScopeOfLeadership.com](http://www.ScopeOfLeadership.com)), and president of Alpine Link Corp ([www.AlpineLink.com](http://www.AlpineLink.com)), a boutique consulting firm specializing in leadership development and sales performance improvement.

For other articles on reaching your peak potential, visit: [www.alpinelink.com/blog](http://www.alpinelink.com/blog)