

# LifeMap<sup>SM</sup>



**"LifeMap is a navigational tool to help you on your path towards personal and professional success. Our belief is that you can achieve a more rewarding career, a more productive organization and a more enjoyable and abundant life."**

**March 20, 2007**

## **This Week's Message:**

### **The Value of "No"**

### **Paths Forward**

### **Resources**

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at your next meeting  
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## **The Value of "No"**

Unless you are a confirmed misanthrope you probably are inclined to cooperate with family, friends, or colleagues whenever you can. It is natural to want to be seen as cooperative, recognized as "nice", and to please others where and when we can. But sometimes requests from others just keep coming and constantly agreeing to them can be a detriment to one's own productivity, stress level and, ultimately, health. This is why knowing how and when to say "no" is a matter of self-respect, self-care and self-

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preservation.

This topic was suggested to me by two very different e-mails I received. One was from a senior manager at Surrey University, U.K. who asked me not to even use her initials because it concerned her boss who has a bad habit of dropping important projects on her desk "at the last minute". The other note was from a young school teacher in the U.S. Midwest region who doesn't earn a large salary, has a fair amount of college loan debt and wondered if I had any good ideas about dealing with the mounting costs of attending his friends "frequent weddings". (His wording – I assume he means different friends are getting married, not that the same friends are getting married over and over.) And, as we all know these "frequent weddings" required gifts, travel and sometimes tuxedo rentals – all of which were busting his budget.

It sometimes takes me a while but I eventually read all the emails I get from members of our LifeMap community so at first I didn't see the connection between these two notes and I thought they were about different topics (managing one's boss and managing one's finances). But it occurred to me that they represented a wide range of situations, from work life to family life to social life, where knowing when and how to say "no" is an invaluable skill. Let's take a look at some ways that you can say "no" while maintaining your reputation as a dedicated employee, a dependable colleague, a valued friend and an integral family member.

### Paths Forward

- **"No" To The Boss.** Your career will not exactly rocket to the top if you develop a habit of saying "no" to your boss. You need to remember that your manager is under pressures with which you are probably not familiar, and that events beyond your scope can turn schedules upside down and supersede everyday tasks with sudden, urgent projects. Thus, a can-do attitude will help you develop your reputation as an invaluable team member. But if your boss is an inveterate procrastinator, a poor planner, plays favorites with staff or, even worse, one who creates disorder and then enjoys the ensuing crisis perhaps you should think about finding another job. In the meantime, make sure you know precisely what is being asked of you (and by what deadline) so that you don't over-commit yourself because you make a faulty, burdensome assumption based on your typical level of thoroughness or accuracy. Try bargaining for extra time,

extra resources, or extra help. Gently remind your boss of the priorities he set for projects you are already working on and come to an agreement on the priority level for the new assignment.

- **“No” To Your Peers.** The key to developing positive collegial relationships is balancing your desire for people to like you with your need for people to respect you. A peer that is constantly trying to pawn work off on you or hit you up to “cover” for them does not respect you. In these situations a courteous and civil “no” can be delivered with statements such as, “I’m sorry I’m up to my neck in my own projects at the moment.” Or, “Sorry, with what I’m working on I don’t have a moment to spare.” Keep it short, keep it friendly and keep it firm (because if you say “maybe”, they will hear “maybe yes” and keep trying). If you must say no to a colleague who rarely asks for help – and whose help you may need in the future – try to offer some other resources, tools, ideas or refer them to another competent peer who you think may be able to help. Get back to them later if your schedule opens up or even just to check in on them to buck up their morale.

- **“No” To Your Family.** Saying “no” to almost anyone can generate a twinge of guilt. But saying “no” to a family member can generate guilt by the bucket load. What is most important here is that you have thought through the reasons why you are saying “no” and that they are consistent with your values and how you are treated within your family structure. Effective parents learn that saying “no” to a constant variety of things is essential for the protection and development of their children. Saying “no” to siblings, parents, in-laws and other family members can be trickier especially if one has become the “go to” caregiver or, even worse, a virtual employee or servant of the family. Sometimes saying “no” to a family member feels like you are letting them down when, in fact, you’re standing up for yourself. Family bonds of love or law give no one unlimited rights to your time, energy, attention or resources and understanding this will help you unload a lot of guilt. After all, respect, courtesy and civility should be more, not less, important within the family arena.

- **“No” To Friends.** You can’t have good friends if you don’t act like one. And good friends are very important sources of emotional and social support so acceding to their reasonable requests, when and where possible, is really in one’s own best interest. But sometimes we just can’t accommodate our

friends' needs. Our Midwestern schoolteacher is a case in point. He has been invited to a series of weddings and he can't afford the expense of attending them all. From his comment about tuxedo rental I assume that, in at least one case, he was asked to be a member of the wedding party. (My wife suggested that he was lucky he didn't have to buy an ugly and expensive bridesmaid's dress!) If he is a close family member or best friend of one member of the happy couple this is one event he's reasonably on the hook for – unless it is to be held in some far flung island in Micronesia. As to the other weddings, he has to do some private prioritizing to determine which are most important to him. A genuine, warm and congratulatory letter expressing his regrets to those he won't be attending will suffice – no long explanations are required, no great apology need be offered, and no guilt need be forgiven. Sending a modest gift, though not required, will certainly be appreciated by a true friend. If, on the other hand, the issue was the cost of gifts rather than the cost of travel maybe our teacher friend could be more creative. When I was getting married I would have greatly valued the gift of someone putting a day aside to help me move, or a week of dog-sitting or help painting a couple of rooms, as much (or more) than another set of stemware. Friendship is a bond of choice and we choose to be friends with those whose values we share and with those whom we can communicate and be honest – and that sometimes includes a well thought out and mandatory “no”.

**LifeMap** is about engaging honestly and supportively with people in all areas of our lives: family, work and friends. When we are occasionally required to say “no” to others we are communicating that we value compassionate honesty and realistic limits in our relationships at the same time we honor and respect ourselves.

## Resources

### ***Someone you know job hunting or thinking about it?***

To order the best, concise, all-round job changing guide available. “Winning Job Interviews: Reduce Interview Anxiety, Outprepare the Other Candidates, Land the Job You Love” by Dr. Paul Powers, click the link below.

### ***Stalled at work? Still struggling to find your true vocation?***

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**Sincerely,**

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