

Navigating After a No

Written by Julie Desmond
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Nothing is more disappointing than taking no for an answer. Imagine Brett Favre's frustration when his doctors said, "No more consecutive starts." Or the look on Joseph's face when he heard the words, "No room at the inn." And yet, Joseph found a suitable solution in a manger nearby, and Favre likely has more football before him. Professionals in sales, customer service and parenting agree, No rarely means no. However, "No" does not mean, "Keep asking," either. No is a simple, two-letter statement indicating that, based on currently available information, the answer at this time is not, "Yes." Capitalizing on the no requires creativity and patience, and new information.

In business, No can be especially defeating. A sales presentation or budget request can take hours to compile; in a split second, the word No can deflate even the Teflon-coated salesperson's heart. The disappointment is acute because everyone knows that a rational person will never change his or her mind once the No is on the table. Tempting, isn't it, to slam the door on your way out. What if, instead, you decide that No is the beginning of the negotiation; No leaves the door open because someone bothered to say it. Your job as the disappointed one is to stop wallowing and spring into action.

First, absorb the No. Let it sink in and resist the urge to react. "Let me understand," you finally say. "This is not right for you at this time?"

Your next line sets the stage for continued conversation, so rehearse until you get it right. "Thank you." Thank you for your response. Thank you for sharing this information. Thank you for allowing me to introduce you to this product/concept/solution. This is an acknowledgement that the No was not a personal attack on you or your presentation; no hard feelings.

If you are going to get a new decision, you must exchange new information with your naysayer. You want to fully collaborate. "May I ask how will you address this need going forward?" I see, I see, I understand, you say, collecting information that reveals more about your customer, his needs, and alternative solutions.

Next, you strategize. Using the additional information you have gathered, determine what new criteria you need to provide. Finally, return to the decision maker and ask for a new decision based on the new information.

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Be patient. The Yes might come only in due time. If you miss out on a job because you didn't graduate, it will take some time to go out and finish school. When you succeed, you can return with new information (your degree) and ask for a new decision (a job offer).

Realize that No is rarely personal. Most people act in their own best interest. Act in your own best interest yourself by learning more about where the No came from, so you can eventually help the decision maker reach a different result.

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