

Ep #51: How To Say “No”



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Kori Linn

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This week we're talking about how to say no and why being able to say no is essential for building a career you love.

You are listening to Love Your Job Before You Leave It, the podcast for ambitious, high-achieving women who are ready to stop feeling stressed about work and kiss burnout goodbye forever. Whether you're starting a business or staying in your day job, this show will give you the coaching and guidance you need to start loving your work today. Here's your host, Career Coach, Kori Linn.

Hey y'all, happy Wednesday. How are you? I'm doing great. Alex is out of town this week and I was a little bit nervous about staying in our giant Victorian house by myself for the first time ever. But it's actually been a really fun week. I had a lovely dinner with some friends the other night. And last night I went to a great local improv show, had a super fun time.

The weather is sort of finally cooling off. It's like getting there. So that's exciting, I'm excited for fall weather here. Because fall weather here is sort of like a lot of other place's summer weather almost. So that is going to be great. And I hope you're having a great week too.

Okay, so this week I want to talk about something that I actually talk about with my clients all the time. And when I had this idea today, I was like, “Wait a minute, why haven't I done a podcast on this already? It's such an important topic.” And that topic is how to say no.

And it sounds so simple, right? Like you just open your face up and say, “No.” But so many of my clients struggle with this so much before coaching. And so we want to look at why that is. Because as we know, lots of times we already know what we “need” to do, or what we should do, or what might be helpful to do, but we're just not doing that shit.

And that can be really mystifying and confusing, but what coaching helps us do is understand the thought patterns that are creating that lack of action, that inaction, or taking action in an opposite direction, like saying yes instead of saying no.

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So if you struggle to say no, let's unpack that a little bit. Why do you think that is? I'm guessing it's probably because you were socialized to say yes, and not to say no. Think about your childhood, like in most of our childhoods I think we're taught to go along with directions, we're taught to do what we're told, we're taught to be agreeable.

And this is especially true for people socialized as women. And this can often also be true with other identities. Especially marginalized identities can also be socialized in this way to say yes, even when we want to say no. And I think even sometimes men get this socialization too, because as children we are taught what to do.

And while the socialization that people socialized as men and people socialized as women receive is different, lots of us can wind up struggling to say no, even when we really want to or need to. And we can have a lot of conflicting thoughts like it's not okay to say no, it's rude to say no, people will be disappointed if we say no, their feelings will be hurt, et cetera, et cetera.

I think there's often also like it'll be awkward to say no, I'll feel uncomfortable if I say no. All of this can come into play when a situation happens that you might want to say no to. And obviously, this podcast is about work, and this is something for the workplace. But this is happening all over people's lives. So I sort of want to just talk about all of it.

We like to break the rules here sometimes on our podcast, the Royal we, yes, and talk about more than just work. Because having a satisfying, successful, wildly delicious career is great and that's what I want for all of you.

I want the podcast to help you create that for yourself. And that's a piece of your larger life and I want you to create a larger life that's also deliciously satisfying as well. So I'm going to talk about all of it, and that's what we're fucking doing here. Okay, good.

So, I want you to think about a time recently when you wanted to say no and didn't. Step one, let's just get really curious about that. What was going

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on? Why did you want to say no? Why did you say yes, instead of saying no? Or whatever answer you gave that wasn't a no.

What examining your situation from this point of view of curiosity will do is it will help you see your particular social conditioning that is blocking you here. And that's important because we want to get underneath the social conditioning that you have.

So it might be different for different people listening to this. The reasons that they say yes, when they mean no, might not be the same. And so the things they're going to need to practice might be different as well. So get curious with yourself and see what is in there for you in particular.

Now, let's think about it from the general point of view. This won't capture everybody, but I think a lot of the time when we're not saying no when we want to say no, we're afraid to say no and saying no feels dangerous for some reason.

Now, like I said, that reason might be different, right? It might be we think we're going to get in trouble. It might be it just feels awkward. It might be it feels inappropriate to say no. I don't know what it is exactly.

But I think a lot of that can fall into this category of I'm afraid to say no for some reason. Saying no seems dangerous for some reason. Saying no seems like it would threaten something, whether the thing it's threatening is politeness, or social agreeability, or your definition of what it means to be a good employee. It can be any of the above.

And I think for a lot of people, they don't want to say no because they see saying no as disrupting connection to other people or disrupting something. Disrupting the social fabric, disrupting the great relationship they have with their boss, whatever it is.

So what I want to offer to you is two ideas. Idea number one is that it's okay to say no for whatever fucking reason you want. And idea number two is sometimes saying no or having a conflict conversation like we've talked

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about before, can actually lead to and allow more connection and better relationships with people.

I think we sometimes get this idea that saying no is going to destroy or harm our reputation, our relationships, et cetera, et cetera. But what if the opposite is true? What if saying no means we can have better relationships with people?

What if saying no means we can get to know that person more deeply, they can get to know us more deeply, and we can have a more satisfying, happy relationship for everybody? Whether that's a work relationship or a personal relationship, or whatever, when we're willing to do that.

There's all kinds of different examples we could look at, what if you're at a networking event and someone asks for something, and you want to say no. You might feel uncomfortable like that's going to ruffle that social agreeability, that politeness I was talking about earlier. What if the opposite could be true there?

What if being able to say no can actually strengthen the social agreeability? What if being able to say no can actually lead to a better experience, not just for you, but also for that other person as well? And this could be all kinds of things.

Sometimes when we say no other people are like, “Oh yeah, saying no is an option.” We can be modeling for them it's okay to say no, that is an available answer. Because I think in our culture a lot of people are saying yes when they want to say no.

So being willing to be the person who says no and being willing to demonstrate doing that in a way that can still be very connected, and very kind and confident is, I think, something that's really amazing to demonstrate for other people.

Not that you ever have to say no to demonstrate anything for other people. It can 100% obviously fully be just for you. But I want to offer that it can

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also serve absolutely everyone else, even if they don't feel like it's serving them at that time.

Okay, so you're allowed to say no for any reason you want to, and you can say no without it necessarily threatening your relationships and connections. And moreover, it can actually benefit your relationships and connections.

Here's another idea I want to offer you, without the ability to say no, you have no ability to truly say yes. What I mean by this is, if no is not an option that you are allowing yourself, you're never actually really saying yes to anything.

There is no true yes, without a true no. If no is not available to us, we're basically forcing ourselves to say yes. And that's not super fun or great in my personal opinion. And I think it also leads to a lot of feeling super burned out, and feeling super drained, and feeling super resentful.

And that can be, I think, confusing for people. I think we get all this messaging as kids about what it means to be good and what it means to live a great life. And then we have these lives where we have all the shit we were told to want and we're like bitter and resentful, and overwhelmed, and burned out. And we're like, “Why?” I’m “doing it all right.”

But you're not doing it all right when you're doing it according to someone else's standards that you absorbed through your brain as a child that don't actually match what you want. And especially when you're not giving yourself the space in your life to decline things.

If you can't decline things, then everything that comes your way just becomes part of your life. And first of all, that can feel incredibly cluttered. And I think that's part of why people feel so incredibly busy and overwhelmed is because they're not saying no to anything, and then everything that gets offered to them is just collecting and filling up all their time and energy.

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Saying no is a gift. It's a gift you're able to give yourself. It's a gift you're able to give other people. And it's a gift you're able to give – when you say no to things you don't want, that opens up space for things you do want. So it's also a gift you give to the things you do want to have in your life.

So how do we actually do it? How do we actually say no? I mean, that part on the one hand is super easy, you just open your face and say no. But on the other hand, it doesn't always feel easy when we're doing it.

So I think one of the things here is that permission piece, giving yourself permission. And then once you do that, it's acknowledging that if you have no practice in this it probably will feel weird and uncomfortable and awkward. And that's okay.

Now, you get to decide how much prep you want to do. But for a person like me, if I were working on saying no, something I might do is think about something I want to say no to and sit down and write out some examples of ways I could say no that still felt really aligned to my values.

So a lot of times when I say no I'm not just opening my face and going, “No.” That is an option, it's not the one I usually choose. As y'all know, I'm a huge fucking fan of the compliment sandwich. I use it for all kinds of stuff in my life. So I might use the compliment sandwich as a way to say no.

And to review, the compliment sandwich doesn't involve ass kissing, it involves true compliments. So I might say, “Hey, thank you so much for asking me to speak to your group. That date is not going to work for me, but I super appreciate you.” That's like a very super simple compliment sandwich.

I can appreciate that someone asked me. I can thank them for asking me. And I can still say no to the opportunity. And that aligns with my particular values. Now for you, it might not be the compliment sandwich, that might not be how you want to do things in your life. And you have your total authority and agency, so have it your way.

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But I think if you don't have practice in this, just even thinking to yourself like, “Okay, what if there's a way to say no that also aligns to my values and who I want to be in the world?” That'll get your brain going and brainstorming on what that might look like.

I think practice is also really great. Something I do with my clients on calls sometimes is I have them practice saying no to me. So I ask them for things. I'm like, “Hey, will you give me the apple you're eating?” No one's eating an apple during a coaching call, so this was a terrible example. But the whole point is I ask them for things and then they say no to me.

And they can say no in all kinds of different ways. And I like to have them practice that too, all the many different ways that they could say no. Because the thing is, when we want to say no, I think we get this like very primal like fear response, a lot of us.

I mean, people who don't struggle with saying no, don't get this probably. But people like me and my clients do. And then we like panic. Versus if you've practiced it in a safe space, if you've written down some ways you could do it, like all things, it gets easier with practice.

Now you're still going to probably feel a lot of discomfort in your body the first time you do it in a real scenario. And, honestly, probably when you practice too. And that's okay because you can handle discomfort and you can do hard things.

So, again, some tools you can use are writing out what you might want to say and thinking about how you can say no, and also align with your values. Your chosen values, not all the bullshit your brain uploaded as a child about how to be a good person. That's not what we're talking about here.

And then maybe consider practicing. You can practice with a friend; you can tell them to ask you for ludicrous things. You can tell them to ask you for things that actually seem perfectly reasonable, but you're still going to say no to those things. And you can have fun with it. You can laugh, you

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can notice how uncomfortable it is your body and then you can notice that you can do it anyway.

I want to say it's not about forcing yourself. It's not about white knuckling through that discomfort. It's about noticing that that emotional discomfort is a set of sensations in your body that you actually have the capacity to allow and feel and handle.

And a lot of times we feel that discomfort either way. Even if we say yes, we're still feeling the discomfort anyways. So if you're gonna feel the discomfort anyways, why not try saying no? If that's what you really want.

And I realize that even though this sounds incredibly simple, this is often super deep work and takes a lot for people to be able to truly employ this tool in their life. And if you need help with this, I want to fucking help you.

So if that's you, come to my website and sign up for a consult. We can talk through how you can say no on the consult call, and then if you want to work with me in a longer term package, we can talk about that too. All right y'all, that's what I have for you. Have an amazing week.

Thank you for listening to Love Your Job Before You Leave It. We'll have another episode for you next week. And in the meantime, if you're feeling super fired up, head on over to korilinn.com for more guidance and resources.