



## Saying No to Opportunity

Kathie Hightower,  
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I've learned over time to say no to the things that I don't want to do in life in order to be able to say yes to the things that I do want to do.

However, there's a bit of a Catch 22 here. I'm still overwhelmed at times. What's that saying? "Too much of a good thing..." You can be doing only things you love to do and still get stressed out. If you are racing from one fantastic event or experience to another with no down time or pause in between, you are setting yourself up for a fall. I know what happens to me if I take on too much. My body rebels and I get sick. (And illness presents one of the toughest time management challenges of all — during and after. So I want to avoid it.)

My challenge now is learning to say no again — only now it is learning to say no to opportunity. I need to learn how to say no to things I DO want to do, but that would make my life crazy if I do them right now.

I'm learning new tricks and tools. I use my calendar as a tool to alert me to possible overload. When I have a big event like a convention keynote speech or a magazine article deadline, I circle it in red in my calendar. My rule is to save at least one day on each side of those events for prep time and down time.

Another thing that helps me is weekly planning. This allows me to see the big picture of what I have to do. Often I'll notice that some appointment I made long ago no longer makes sense or is feasible. In the past I would have kept that appointment sacred and just dealt with a crazy schedule — or possibly neglected something even more important. Now, I've learned to call and see if I can reschedule or even cancel. What fascinates me is that almost every time I've had to do that, the other person has thanked me because their schedule too had gotten crazy since we initially made our plans.

Most importantly, I have ways to make my decision. The first step is to get clear on your overall dream and see if the opportunity is on track to get you to that end result.

I keep an index card in my calendar book. On it I listed the things/activities/people that are important to me — that are my priorities in life. Before I say yes to something big, I check through that list to see if the request fits in. On the other side of the card I have specific questions for when I'm asked to speak to a group. These again are based on my priorities. I want to make conscious choices in what I take on — based on my values not based on the fee involved.

When I'm asked to do something I really want to do, but I can tell it would make my life too hectic if I take it on, I ask a few other questions to help me decide.

- Will this opportunity ever come again if I don't do it now?
- Is there a possibility of shifting it to a better time? (Sometimes all it takes is asking the question.)
- Are there other things I could shift or give up to allow space for this?
- And, if no shifting is possible, do I want to do it badly enough that I'm willing to accept a time period of overload and craziness in order to do it? (Sometimes I do, but I want to be conscious that that is what I'm choosing to do. And it stops me from complaining and whining if I make a conscious choice.)

These decisions are not easy, obvious decisions. That's when being really clear on your priorities comes into play. And remember, pause and downtime, rest and recuperation, should be right up there with your other top priorities.

Sidebar

Great Resource!: How to Say No Without Feeling Guilty by Patti Breitman and Connie Hatch, Broadway Books, 2000.

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