

New Year's Resolution: Just Say No

Wall Street Journal advice columnist Jennifer Breheny Wallace has written a brilliant piece on the power of saying NO. Here are some excerpts:

- Time-use surveys reveal that we have more leisure time than in decades past—but you'd hardly know it from how busy everyone feels. A prime reason for our modern busyness is, of course, our inability to just say no: no to the recurring, unproductive meeting, no to volunteering to be class parent, no to the endless demands on our time.
- So how do you say no without looking or feeling like a jerk? Enter "personal policies." Personal policies are an established set of simple rules that guide your decisions and actions. On the surface, they offer a gentler way of saying no, as in: "I don't take work calls on Saturdays because that's my time with family." On a deeper level, they encourage reflection, help to define priorities and aid decision-making, especially with in-the-moment requests. They can stop you from defaulting to that regretful "yes."
- There may be an evolutionary reason for our saying yes even when we don't want to. Rejection hurts—but rejecting someone can cause feelings of anxiety and guilt, too. Some evolutionary psychologists theorize that those negative emotions warn us that we're doing something that may not ultimately be in our best interest. "Saying 'no' to someone goes against our basic need to forge and maintain connections, which were once fundamental to survival," says Kristin Sommer, a professor of psychology at Baruch College at the City University of New York.

- Here's a simple guide to getting started: Begin by defining a priority (like making it home for family dinners), name the sources of stress that interfere (such as evening work meetings), design a personal policy around it and then let others know: "I don't take meetings after 6 p.m."

- When the late literary critic Edmund Wilson was asked to do things that took him away from his writing, he replied with a form letter. It started with "Edmund Wilson regrets that it is impossible for him to:" and went on to list 21 items, including "read manuscripts," "give interviews" and "contribute to or take part in symposiums or 'panels' of any kind."

Global Slowdown

Melting Arctic glaciers due to climate change are raising sea levels, which is causing the Earth's rotation to slow down about a millisecond per day. (Earthweek.com)

Killer Kitty

Scott McKellar heard of a cat in El Granada that took on a raccoon and killed it, turning the tables on the much bigger clawed critter. My feline friend Sadie would be jealous. She is fearless and often snarls back at raccoons in our backyard, though of course there is a screen door between them.

Pacifica Police Beat

My favorite item in last week's edition of Police Beat: "At a complex on Gateway Drive, five subjects jumped the fence to the pool area and are having sex." They must be really exhausted by now!

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