



Breaking Through Bias

Saying "NO" Tip Sheet

You are asked to do something that won't advance your career.

Can you say "No"?

The answer to this depends on several factors:

- Where are you in your career?
 - Whether you are just starting out or well established makes a difference in your ability to say no. If you have been with your company for less than a year or two and your boss asks you to take on a noncore project, the request is not likely to be a request, but an assignment. On the other hand, if you are a fully functioning member of a team with solid accomplishments behind you, you have considerably more flexibility about saying no. In either situation, however, the essential question is whether saying yes will help you be successful in your organization. Consider whether saying yes will be useful for your career advancement, provide you with experiences to develop essential job skills, or be personally fulfilling. Unless you answer yes to at least one of these questions, you need to think seriously about saying no.
- What time commitment would be involved?
 - Will it take you away from or disrupt your other responsibilities? Will it reduce the time you spend on things for yourself or time with your friends and family? Depending on who asks, your position in the organization, and the strategic importance for your career of accepting the request, you may conclude you need to take on the project even if it means significantly longer hours on the job and less time for yourself and your family.
- How many other noncore projects are you already handling?
 - If these noncore projects are fairly distributed around your organization, you need to handle your appropriate share. But if these projects are going disproportionately to women or to you in particular because you are so good at them, it is time to start saying no.