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TOMORROW'S PROFESSORSM eNEWSLETTER



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*I continue to struggle with the "just say no" advice, but I have improved over time. The keys to making it work are: 1) self-awareness about why you feel the need to say "yes" so often and 2) developing a process for evaluating and responding to the never-ending stream of service requests you receive. Here are the six guidelines that Tracey Laszloffy and I suggest in *The Black Academic's Guide to Winning Tenure Without Losing Your Soul*.*

1364. The Art of Saying "No"

Folks:



The posting below gives some great advice on how to say "no" to requests that aren't in your best interest. It is by Kerry Ann Rockquemore, PhD, President and CEO of the National Center for Faculty Development & Diversity [<http://www.facultydiversity.org/>] It is from her Monday Motivator series of which you can find out more about at: <http://www.facultydiversity.org/?page=MondayMotivator>.



Regards,

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----- 2,670 words -----

The Art of Saying "No"

One of the most frequent and difficult pieces of advice I received as a pre-tenure faculty member was "just say no." I always felt frustrated by this advice because (while well-intended and correct) it

is far easier said than done, especially for under-represented faculty. This difficulty is due to the fact that being the only _____ in your department means you will receive a disproportionately high number of service requests from all across your campus in the name of "diversity." That additional service will neither be rewarded, nor serve as a substitute for published research (at a research-intensive university), nor will it offset lackluster teaching evaluations (at a teaching-intensive institution) when it comes time for your promotion and tenure decision. While "just say no" is important advice for all tenure-track faculty, it is essential for under-represented faculty who are challenged to say "no" more frequently, and to a broader range of campus leaders, in order to have the necessary time to excel in the areas that matter most to promotion: research, publication, and teaching.

I continue to struggle with the "just say no" advice, but I have improved over time. The keys to making it work are: 1) self-awareness about why you feel the need to say "yes" so often and 2) developing a process for evaluating and responding to the never-ending stream of service requests you receive. Here are the six guidelines that Tracey Laszloffy and I suggest in *The Black Academic's Guide to Winning Tenure Without Losing Your Soul*.

1) Avoid Saying "Yes" On The Spot Whenever someone asks you to do something, avoid saying "yes" before you've had time to consider the request. Try to buy some time by saying something like "Let me check my calendar/workload and I'll get back to you," "I'm currently overwhelmed, so I need to think seriously about taking on any additional service commitments" or just "I'll email you tomorrow." If you're consistently holding your Sunday Meeting, then one look at your weekly time map will make it clear whether (or not) you have time available to accommodate any additional requests.

2) Estimate How Long It Will Actually Take You To Complete The Request I keep track of how much time various routine requests take so that I can be informed when I make decisions. For example, while a search committee always sounds like an exciting and important opportunity to meet new scholars, shape the future of the department, and enjoy a few free dinners, it's also an enormous time commitment. Specifically, it takes 70-80 hours of my time from the initial meeting to the receipt of a signed offer letter. An independent study = 15 hours, an article review = 6 hours, an "informal talk" to a community group = 5 hours. Your time estimates may be different than mine but what's important is connecting any request you receive with actual hours of labor. And if you don't know how long something will take, don't guess - ask your colleagues, peers and/or mentors (then multiply by 2 to correct for academic's tendency to underestimate the amount of time tasks take to complete).

3) Consult Your Calendar Like most of you, my calendar is jam-packed and the further we get into the semester, the less time I have available. When someone makes a request, ask yourself: what specific day and time do I have available to complete this task? Not in a general sense, but literally what day, and what period of time are available in your calendar for this activity? Given that you're not going to compromise your daily writing, research time, or class time, this often makes the decision clear and easy. If you can't schedule it in your calendar, then you don't have time to do it.

4) Ask Yourself: Why Would I Say "Yes"? For a long time, "yes" was my unconscious default response. I automatically responded "yes" and thought I had to have a special reason to say "no." Then each semester, I ended up spending too much time on service, got exhausted, and became angry, resentful, and inter-personally unpleasant. Finally I started asking myself: "why do you keep saying yes all the time?" For me, it was some combination of bad gender socialization, wanting to please people who had power over me, trying to avoid the punishment I imagined would occur if I said "no," overcompensating for other aspects of my work where I felt less confident, trying to correct longstanding historical and structural inequalities at my institution, single-handedly making up for all the systemic failures my students had experienced in their academic career, and seeking to nullify all negative stereotypes by being super-minority-faculty-member. With all those intentions operating under the surface, no wonder I kept saying "yes" to every request or alternatively, feeling intense guilt, shame and disappointment on the few occasions I said "no." Thankfully, once I became aware of why I said "yes" so often, I was able to develop a new criteria for evaluating

requests and flip my default upside down. Now my automatic response is "no" and I require a special reason to say "yes" (and don't worry, there are still plenty of those!).

5) Figure Out How To Say "No" And Do It! There are so many ways to say "no" and I am always shocked by how easily people accept "no" for an answer and move on to find someone else to accommodate their request. You could say "no" in any of the following ways: "That sounds like a really great opportunity, but I just can't take on any additional commitments at this time." "I am in the middle of _____, _____, and _____ [fill in the blanks with your most status-enhancing and high profile service commitments] and if I hope to get tenure, I'm unable to take on any additional service." "I'm not the best person for this, why don't you ask _____." "If you can find a way to eliminate one of my existing service obligations, I will consider your request." "No." [look the asker in the eye and sit in silence].

6) Serve Strategically Finally, the best advice one of my mentors gave me was to be strategic about my service. That means, you want to determine what percentage of your tenure and promotion evaluation will be based on service. It doesn't have to be perfectly precise, but whatever the percentage is, use it as a guideline for how much time you can spend on service each week. If service only counts as 10% of your promotion criteria, then spending anything more than 4-6 hours per week on service activities means you're over-functioning in that area. The percentage will be different according to your institutional type and culture, but once you know approximately how much time you can spend on service each week, then say "yes" only to the things that fit your broader agenda or make substantive sense for you to participate in. Learning how, when and why to "just say no" isn't easy. It takes time, practice, and clarity. But doing so is an important part of making time for the things that really matter to your long-term success and keeping you from getting burned out while on the tenure-track.

The Weekly Challenge

This week, I challenge you to do the following: If you feel overwhelmed by service commitments (or aren't happy with your research and writing productivity), patiently ask yourself why you say "yes" so frequently.

Gently acknowledge that the reality of life on the tenure-track is that you will ALWAYS have more service requests than time to fulfill them.

For one week, say "no" to EVERY new request you receive (just to see what it feels like).

With each request, let "no" be your default response and wait for a reason to say "yes".

If that seems too crazy, then at least commit to reviewing your calendar and existing tasks before saying "yes" to any new commitments.

Re-commit yourself to 30-60 minutes each day for your writing. If you need help sustaining that habit, why not join us in the discussion forums for our September Writing Challenge?

If you haven't created a semester plan, it's not too late.

If you want to go deeper into the Art of Saying No, why not download the tele-workshop on this topic?

I hope this week brings you insight into the reasons why you say "yes" so frequently and the strength to say "no" often, confidently, and without guilt.

Peace and Productivity, Kerry Ann

The Art of Saying "No" continued

Last week's Monday Motivator ("Just Say NO") touched a raw nerve for many readers, albeit in completely different ways. Whenever I encourage people to "just say no," I tend to receive mail from

senior faculty denouncing it for offering bad advice while pre-tenure and newly tenured associate professors express relief that I've articulated one of the most difficult challenges they face. In fact, the majority of mail I received was from faculty whose recent departmental reviews encouraged them to produce more scholarship and learn how to say "no" to service requests. And yes, these were both Assistant and Associate professors! I assume all the hand-wringing and anxiety about saying "no" is because it's difficult, it taps into the intersection of our values and our struggles to manage time, and -- for under-represented faculty -- it highlights one of many invisible structural challenges that occur when you're the only _____ in your department. It's also the case that service-overload is pervasive and too-often debilitating to the research productivity of faculty at times when publication and funding expectations for tenure and/or promotion seem to be ever-escalating.

Given the rather intense interest in this topic, I want to spend one more week discussing "the N-word." But this week, I want to share two of the best strategies I've learned to deal with service-overload: 1) establishing an "N-Committee" and 2) conceptualizing your faculty career as a "book with many chapters."

Strategy #1: Establish an "N-Committee" One of my most productive former colleagues (who is also a mother of three small children) taught me this strategy. She suggested that people who have extraordinary difficulty saying "no" work towards creating what she calls an "N-committee." Her N-committee consists of two people who help filter the unending stream of requests that flow through her phone, e-mail, and office each day. She never accepts a commitment on the spot. Instead, once she receives any request, she brings it to her N-Committee to discuss the pros and cons of accepting an additional service commitment. She told me that: "99% of the time, I walk away from those conversations, not only ready to say "no," but with a really sound sense in my own mind of why "no" is the right answer."

As soon as I learned this strategy, I put it into immediate use. For me, the wisdom of the "N-Committee" is that it serves as an external and objective filter through which I can run service requests. Setting it up was quite simple, I just asked two people the following question: "I'm struggling with too much service and saying "no". Would you be willing to be on my N-Committee?" Since everyone who knows me recognizes that I tend to say "yes" too often and then become cranky, resentful, and ineffective when I hit service overload, the people I asked were delighted to assist me in this way.

Strategy #2: Think of Your Career As A Book With Many Chapters

While I love my N-Committee, the single best advice I've received about saying "no" is to conceptualize my career as a book with many chapters. If you hope to be a faculty member for many years, why not try taking a long-term view of your career and visualizing your tenure-track years as one of the early chapters of that book. Clearly, the main themes of this early chapter are research, writing and publication (if you are at a research-intensive university). But you can also imagine later chapters that have different and exciting themes. For example, a tenure-track faculty member (I'll call her Sara) recently shared her version of this exercise with me and while her first chapter focused on research (she works at a public research-intensive university), a later chapter centered on organizational work she wants to do to transform the climate and policies of her institution around parental leave and the creation of a campus child-care center. Another chapter focused on becoming a master-teacher. A later chapter had her writing a trade book for a popular audience, working with the media, and serving more broadly as a public intellectual. And with her accrued wisdom, she imagined the final chapters focusing on working in her local community for social change.

I love this metaphor, and the idea of different chapters of my career having different central themes. It does not mean that I work exclusively on one, and only one type of activity, but instead it clarifies what's on the front burner and what's on the back burner during any particular five year period of time. Similarly, Sara told me that having this new long-term perspective makes it easier for her to say "no" to things that aren't a top priority of her work in the current chapter (i.e., right now). In other words, just knowing that there will be a later chapter that focuses on becoming a

master-teacher has allowed her to accept (without guilt, shame or frustration) the limited time she can spend on undergraduate teaching during her tenure-track years. And because she's confident that she will write for a general audience in a future chapter of her career, it allows her to work enthusiastically on her academic writing today. And most importantly, knowing that she will have later chapters where institutional and social change are on the front burner, allows her the freedom to say "no" to overwhelming service commitments that aren't a good fit for her current career stage and that would detract from her ability to obtain external funding, conduct research, write, and publish (her current priorities).

The Weekly Challenge

This week's challenge is for those of you who: a) feel overwhelmed by institutional service, b) are not as productive in your writing and research as you need to be promoted at the next level, and c) aren't sure how to say "no" to people who have more power than you. If that sounds familiar, then I challenge you to try the following:

Take 15 minutes to write about your career as a book with many chapters and imagine what the central focus of later chapters might be. When you're finished with this exercise, release yourself from the need to do everything for everyone RIGHT NOW. Locate at least two people to be on your N-Committee. Use your N-Committee to filter every service request you receive this week (just to see what it feels like to bring other people into your decision making process). This doesn't need to be more than a 5-minute phone call, email, or in person chat. If you are struggling with the deeper issues around saying "no," why not download the audio and slides from our "The Art of Saying No" core-training workshop. Re-commit yourself to 30-60 minutes each day for your writing; it's the one thing that will ensure your scholarship remains a top priority. If you need support, why not join the September Writing Challenge. I am incredibly thankful to the wise folks who keep the tips, strategies, and insight flowing into my mailbox. I hope this week brings them extra good karma, and everyone else the strength to proactively reach out to others for nurturing and professional support. Peace and Productivity,

Kerry Ann Rockquomore, PhD President, National Center for Faculty Development & Diversity

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