

How to Say No Without Saying No

The key is to redirect, not reject.

How to Use This Guide

We can create some scripts for common scenarios we have all experienced. Read, tweak, and use them, and come and join our [free marketing community](#) to tell us how you have got on.

The “Great Idea for Later” Redirect

When someone suggests a new project:

"That's an exciting idea. Right now I'm focused on [strategic goal] in Q1, but this sounds like something we should explore in Q2 when we're focusing on [relevant area]. Can I add it to our Q2 planning doc so we don't lose it?"

Why this works: You're not saying no. You're saying "not now" and showing strategic thinking.

The Capacity Check

When asked to take on additional work:

"I'd love to help with this. Right now I'm working on [three goals]. If this becomes a priority, which of these should I pause or hand over?"

Why this works: You're forcing a priority conversation. They either tell you what to drop (documenting the decision) or they realise it's not that urgent.

The Timeline Reality Check

When someone wants something done quickly:

"I can absolutely do this. Given my current commitments to [strategic goals], I could realistically deliver this by [realistic date]. Does that timeline work, or should we look at other options?"

Why this works: You're not refusing. You're being honest about capacity and giving them agency.

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The Scope Clarification

When a “quick task” turns out to be bigger:

“I want to make sure I’m understanding the scope correctly. This sounds like it would take [realistic time estimate] to do properly. Is that what you’re looking for, or did you have something more lightweight in mind?”

Why this works: Often, people don’t realise what they’re asking for. This creates space for a realistic conversation.

The Alternative Solution

When you genuinely can’t take something on:

“I won’t be able to give this the attention it deserves right now because of [strategic commitment]. Have we considered [alternative approach/person/solution]?”

Why this works: You’re still being helpful by problem-solving, just not taking on the work yourself.

The “Not My Wheelhouse” Boundary

When asked to do non-marketing work (hello, email login issues):

“I would love to help, but [IT tasks/project management/finance work] isn’t really my area of expertise. Would it make more sense to involve [appropriate team] who could do this properly?”

Why this works: You’re protecting your role boundaries while acknowledging the need.

The Strategic Pushback

When your boss adds something to your plate:

“Absolutely, I can make this work. Just to make sure I’m prioritising correctly, would this take precedence over [current strategic goal]? I want to make sure I’m focusing my energy where it creates the most value for the business.”

Why this works: You’re reframing as a strategic question, not a capacity issue. It shows you’re thinking about business impact.

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The Quarterly Review Defence

When you're asked why you can't fit something in:

"In our Q1 planning, we agreed the priority was [three goals]. I'm protecting time to deliver on those commitments. If this is now more important, let's discuss how to adjust the quarterly plan."

Why this works: You're referencing an agreed-upon strategy, not just saying you're busy.

Making this stick: Implementation Guide

Step 1: Set Your 3 Goals

- Identify three strategic goals for the quarter
- Get agreement from your manager and buy-in from your team (if applicable)
- Document them somewhere visible

Step 2: Practice Your Scripts

- Pick three scripts based on common requests you need to start saying "no" to
- Write them out in your own words
- Practice saying them out loud (seriously - come to elevenses to test them on me if you want!)

Step 3: Start Redirecting

- Use the two second test for every request
- Try one of the scripts
- Reflect on what worked

Step 4: Refine, Repeat & Enjoy

- What's working? Do more of it.
- What's not working? Adjust your approach.
- Notice when you are having to redirect less and enjoy that creative space!

Share your results in the Discord community

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