FREE CHAPTER SAMPLE

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I Meant No.

Stop saying yes
when you mean no.
Handle what happens next.

CAMILLE THOMAS

SELF TRUST, IN PRACTICE.

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About this sample

Free opening chapter. Reading edition.

The complete book is in editorial development. All named people and conversations are fictional. This sample is educational reading, not individual professional advice.

CHAPTER 1

The answer you give before you check

Maya is in her kitchen when the voice message arrives. Her friend has found an apartment. The move is Saturday. Could Maya help for the morning?

“Of course,” Maya says into her phone. “Just tell me what time.”

She has not looked at her calendar. She has not asked what the morning includes. The yes feels like a small expression of affection. A second later, it has become something another person can plan around.

Her friend sends the address, then the time: nine until one. There is a truck, a flight of stairs, and furniture that will need two people. Maya remembers the application she has promised herself she will finish that weekend. She needs to collect a prescription while the pharmacy is open. She had kept Saturday clear for both.

Nothing was written in a colored box on the calendar. That did not make the morning available.

Maya feels annoyed with herself. Then she feels annoyed with her friend. But her friend heard an uncomplicated yes. She had no reason to know about the decision Maya had skipped.

This is where the book begins: before a generous impulse becomes a promise you have not examined.

The request and the relationship

You may want to help because you love the person asking. You may also want to avoid the uncomfortable second in which they hear that you cannot. Those motives can arrive together. Neither tells you what the request will require.

The relationship matters. So does the actual Saturday. A useful decision includes both.

Maya could choose to move the application work to Sunday and help for four hours. She could offer less, if that genuinely fits. She could discover that the commitments she already has leave no responsible room. The answer is not predetermined by whether she considers herself a good friend.

The choice becomes clearer when she stops asking what kind of person says no and starts asking what she would be agreeing to do.

Find out what the yes contains

“Help for the morning” includes travel, carrying, waiting, and whatever happens if the move runs late. An open hour and the capacity to make that contribution are different things.

Ask for the detail that changes the decision: “What would you need me to do, and when would I be able to leave?” If an event has a fixed ending, check it. If a favor might grow, ask

which part you would own.

The same principle applies to a recurring request. Driving someone once and becoming their usual transport are different commitments. Reviewing a document and taking responsibility for finishing it are different contributions. An accurate yes needs an accurate request.

A pause that leads somewhere

For a request that can wait, Maya could have answered: “Let me check Saturday. I’ll tell you tonight.” That would have left her friend with a reply time and Maya with a chance to decide.

A pause earns its usefulness at the other end. Check what needs checking, choose an answer, and reply when you said you would. Otherwise, the person asking is left managing your indecision as well as their own plan.

Sometimes they need an answer sooner than you can provide it. You can say: “I can’t give you a reliable answer in time. Please plan without me.” They may do exactly that. Taking time can cost you a place in the plan.

For an urgent responsibility or work you are assigned to perform, the decision may be about priorities or a confirmed handoff rather than whether to answer at all. We return to those situations in Chapters 6 and 8.

Your answer needs a reason you understand

Before collecting other people’s opinions, consider the request yourself. What is being asked? What have you already promised? What would accepting require you to change? What do you want to give?

These questions form the Request Review used throughout the book. They are a way to make the decision visible, not a test with a correct result. The reason helps you understand your answer. You will decide separately how much of that reason belongs in the conversation.

Maya may realize she wants to give two hours. That offer still needs checking. If those hours would leave her unable to meet another commitment, a smaller yes has merely made the same problem smaller.

If she can responsibly give them, the answer becomes specific: “I can help from nine until eleven. I’ll need to leave at eleven. Would that be useful?” Her friend is allowed to say it would not.

An offer has two sides. It needs to fit the person making it and the person planning around it.

The answer, the cost, and what comes next

Three questions will stay with us through the book. What is my answer? What does it cost the people involved? What will I need to do after saying it?

A no to a new invitation might cost someone your company and require a timely reply. A change to a promise may cost them an arrangement they relied on and require a repair. A time limit may require you to end the call when the time arrives.

Keeping those questions together prevents a sentence from becoming a substitute for a decision. The words matter because other people will use them to plan. Your follow through matters because it gives those words a dependable meaning.

Maya has already created an expectation

Maya cannot return to the moment before she answered. Her friend has now booked the truck. This changes what she needs to consider.

She can check whether she can keep the original commitment. If she cannot, she needs to tell her friend promptly, explain what changed, and address the effect. “I answered before checking” is an admission she can use to begin the repair. It is not an explanation that makes the inconvenience disappear.

We will return to that conversation in Chapter 6. For now, notice how much of it could have been avoided by taking a little time before promising the morning.

The next request will give you another opportunity. It may still receive a yes. Let that yes describe a contribution you have chosen, rather than a decision you will have to discover afterwards.