

Momentum

Playbook 22

Defining Your Borders

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Playbook 22:

Defining Your Borders

The “Yes” That Should Have Been “No”

A few years back, a stranger emailed me. He was referred to me by a loyal member of my email tribe (whom I'd also never met).

A business coach to chiropractic practices, he seemed energetic and nice. We instantly hit it off talking about growing up on the East Coast and our shared love for the Mets.

“Would you like to do a joint training with me for my coaching program?” he asked.

This was a very small niche audience that I wouldn't usually target, but I liked his drive and thought my content could really help. Heck, some more exposure couldn't hurt, right? I didn't have a lot of bandwidth, as I had a U.K. family vacation coming up, but he agreed to pay my fee for the webinar... scheduled for the day after my Europe return.

My first red flag: He kept promising to send follow-up info and digitally sign the contract but kept “forgetting.” Hey, people get busy, I thought. And he was being so responsive in other ways, so...

The second red flag: I presented a draft deck for feedback...and got radio silence. A few emails and phone calls later, I finally got a hold of him and he had a great excuse for why he'd been out of touch.

But now I was nervous. My spidey-sense told me something here was not quite right. There were many little things he had promised but failed to deliver. So I honestly shared my concerns and requested a 50% upfront deposit be sent to me prior to the webinar. This is actually something I normally do, but because of how quickly this was all coming together, I hadn't asked.

He balked, lecturing me about cash flow. While I apologized for springing this on him, I told him point blank, “Your lack of response is making me nervous. And I've already done all this work.”

He finally signed the contract and agreed to the deposit. He assured me I'd have the check before my trip. It never came, nor did final feedback. So I had to take my laptop on my trip. Ugh!

He requested some final changes over email so I took time away from my family to do them. And did not hear another peep from the guy.

I kept emailing him, “What is the presenter link and call-in information for the training?”

Nothing. Days ticked by.

Jet-lagged on webinar day, I woke up early, hoping he had sent the information by then. The clock ticked closer to the start time. I ripped off emails and phone calls to him, to the point of stalking.

Nothing.

The training time came and went.

I sent numerous follow-ups and reminded him that he not only owed me the deposit, but that I had taken time out from my own family vacation. If something serious had happened, I said I would understand but to please give me the professional courtesy to explain.

For months, nothing. I sent him a final LinkedIn note months later. I reiterated my displeasure and reminded him that my materials were copyrighted so “my lawyer and I” were hoping he was not using them. He finally responded, acting like he had not screwed me over and said I could call him to talk. He never once acknowledged his behavior. I told him I’d already spent enough time chasing him down and if he cared to explain his unprofessionalism, he could call ME.

He never did. I removed him from my LinkedIn network.

Moral of the story: When something doesn’t feel right, know when to say no.

The Art and Beauty of Saying No

Before you can fill up your days with profitable client work, nourishing activity or fruitful partnerships, you have to make space for it.

That means getting really comfy with the word, “No.”

If you constantly say “Yes” to all the wrong things, this leaves you no space, time or energy to commit to the things you truly want—and it limits your ability to say yes when the “right” things come along.

My opening story is an easy example of seeing when we need to say “No.”

But saying “No” to what we think might be a great opportunity or a fun activity is much harder:

- Helping a friend with her work when we’re absolutely slammed
- Meeting someone for coffee who wants to “pick your brain”
- Taking on a client who you don’t get along with or who is flaky from the start just because the project is worth a lot of money
- Speaking for free at that local event even when you have a ton of paid work to do because you “might” get some good exposure
- Volunteering to head up that charity committee when you already don’t have enough time to spend with your family
- Signing up for a 5K on a weekend when you already have six things going on.

Every driven entrepreneur can relate to this, and if you can't, I'd love to meet you.

We all worry about saying “no” to potential clients, partners and even advertising opportunities. What if this is my one chance to attract a boatload of customers? What if this is the only client I get this quarter?

The old adage, *“A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush”* is definitely true.....sometimes.

If you constantly accept clients who don't fit your ideal profile or the type of work you want to be doing, how can you free yourself up to attract a better, more profitable client for the long run?

Don't let other people's priorities hijack your own. If you are always making time to help others while avoiding your own to-do's, how can you accomplish your goals?

The great news is that your work in MOMENTUM will help you determine if someone or something is a good fit. It will help you say no to seductive marketing opportunities (*“Wow! This event attracts 5000 women. I should totally pay to be there.”*) that, in reality, turn out to be a waste of time and money (*“Oh, those 5000 women will never be the ones who will buy from me.”*)

Do Them a Big Favor

The hardest time you'll have in saying “no” is when you really, really want to say “yes.”

It's not just about saying no to things you hate, but saying no to things you might love.

It's hard. You just want to say “yes” and help someone. I've agreed to coffee dates or client projects in the past when I didn't really have the bandwidth. And it was selfish of me, because I was crazed, distracted and couldn't give them my best.

Consider this: I've hired many assistants and vendors over the years that should never have taken on my work. With no ill intent, they wasted my time and money and then failed to get the work done, when I really needed it. Sometimes it was due to personal issues that prevented them from following through, which I get, but they really should have been kind and told me “no.” This behavior has put me in a really bad spot on many occasions.

Whether you get asked to volunteer for that charity auction, take on work that's not your sweet spot, or take on a client whose personality clashes with your own, saying “no” is a kindness.

Saying “No” is actually a classy and kind gift.

It means you give 100% of yourself when you *do* say yes. It means you find more joy and drive in your commitment.

And for purely unselfish reasons, when you turn down a client, partnership or a volunteer opportunity,

you graciously allow them to find a better, more perfect fit. You give them the chance to find the right person who's "all in" to achieve their goals.

Remember: You Own Your Time

It may not seem like it most days, but you *do*!

Always remember: When you say "yes" to something, that means you are saying "no" to something else. And potentially something more vital and important to you.

Saying "No" keeps you in charge of your time.

You can say no in an elegant and tactful way:

- Explain to prospective clients that you don't have bandwidth right now with your current workload, or you can recommend another resource that might be a better fit for their needs.
- Tell prospective partners that their opportunity looks fabulous but you are going in a different direction with your business or target market.
- Turn down potential marketing or advertising opportunities by simply saying, "Thank you for thinking of me, but based on my current goals, this is not the most valuable way for me spend my time and money."

Remember, more than just taking up time, your clients and partners say something about your brand. They are your advertising. Choose wisely.

By focusing on what you want, your strengths and what you can realistically deliver, people will appreciate your honesty more than they'll appreciate you not having the time or mental energy to properly serve their needs.

How to Say No Gracefully

Use your "No" as an opportunity to form a very positive brand impression. And where you can, offer the requestor some other options, connections or avenues for help. Try not to leave them high and dry.

Here are some examples you can borrow when you need to draw your boundaries and say "No" even when things seem like fantastic opportunities.

For a client who is not the right fit:

Thank you so much for reaching out to work with me. I appreciate the kind praise and really enjoyed speaking with you about your project. It's clear that you're passionate about (SAY SOMETHING SPECIFIC) and that it will greatly help (MENTION THE BENEFITS THEY MAY BE LOOKING FOR OR THE AUDIENCE FOR THE WORK THEY DO).

While I'm always eager to work with new clients like you, my bandwidth unfortunately, is completely maxed out. But here are a few other people and resources that may be perfectly suited to help you: (LIST OUT A FEW REFERRALS OR RESOURCES HERE).

While we won't be able to work together this time around, I wish you the best of success. Please keep in touch and tell me how it all goes!

For someone requesting a "pick your brain" coffee date. PS: Another way to handle such requests is to offer a short paid coaching session.

It would be such a treat to meet with you and talk about your (BUSINESS PLANS, BOOK IDEA, SELF-CARE NEEDS, FINANCE CHALLENGES...). And of course, offering me a vanilla latte is the key to my heart. But, alas, I must graciously decline.

Honestly, other commitments and client work are taking up all my time so I won't be able to fit in this lovely conversation right now. That is, if my family wants to see me at all! :)

I'm sure you understand: My paid client work has to come first. But please don't fret! My time may free up in a few months so please ping me then to see if we can get a date on the books. In the meantime, please reach out if you need referrals or other resources and I'll do my best to help you from afar!

For a company or brand offering you a marketing/advertising opportunity:

Wow! Thank you for thinking of me. This sounds like an absolutely amazing promotional opportunity and I may be kicking myself in the future, but I'll need to respectfully say no. My budget and time is already committed to targeting a slightly different audience and I'm focusing more of my efforts on (LIST SOME EXAMPLES) these days.

But....I may know some folks who would be a perfect fit for you. Would you mind if I passed your information along to them? Or if you would prefer a direct email introduction, let's make that happen. Again, thank you so much for thinking of me and please reach out if I can help you promote this event or be of any help in the future. I'm cheering on your success!

For an interview request:

Thank you for thinking of me for this podcast interview. Your podcast sounds like (SAY SOMETHING NICE ABOUT THEIR MEDIA OUTLET). I'm flattered by your kind praise for my work. It really is a joy to do what I do!

As much as I can, I try to make time to do such interviews and it has helped me meet so many interesting and talented people, just like you. Unfortunately, my schedule is just too jam-packed at the moment to give you the time you deserve, so I will need to graciously say no.

Thank you again for reaching out. It means a lot. Please let me know how I can help promote you in any way. And when my schedule opens up, it would be wonderful to sync back up with you to see if we can offer your audience some great content!

Your Assignment: Practice Your NO

What “time-sucking” requests frustrate you the most?

What tasks or commitments would you like to take off your plate so you can do more of what you love/need?

Draft a gracious “No” email to someone requesting your time or work, using one of the templates above. Or create your own!

But wait, you're not quite done....

Now: Please share your “No” email or any insights about this lesson on the Facebook page by Friday. We're happy to review your email if you need us to!

Remember, we are here to encourage you and provide any feedback. If you're like me, often it's fellow collaborators that help me polish my ideas to a glossy sheen.

Again, I'm going to reward you all year long, so don't lose your MOMENTUM: Post it now and keep that train moving!

One Last Thing...

All that's left to say here is to repeat the most important points.

You are not selfish or mean if you say no. You are being respectful of your own priorities, as well as being kind in letting someone find a better option.

When you establish your boundaries, people will respond and respect you. If you don't give them boundaries, they will always want to cross them and get more from you. They will always ask. They will always expect.

Being clear and strong with your boundaries is sexy!

“No” can be graceful and classy. And how you do it will make your brand memorable.

And remember, that saying “NO” is a gift for others and a gift to yourself. You are no good to anyone if you say yes all the wrong things, making you stressed, miserable and sad. That won't help anyone.

Oh, and that guy from the webinar? The experience became fodder for [one of my MSNBC media appearances](#). So....*thank you?!?!*

Draw your borders!

Maria

Goodies and Inspirations

[How to Say No to Everything Ever](#): More ideas on how to draft a graceful and clear “no” from the uber-talented Alexandra Franzen. Did you know that many people attribute Steve Jobs’ success to his ability to say “no” to 1000 things?!

[Top Ten Ways to Say No And Save Time](#). I love the tip here about “buying yourself time” to craft a classy no before committing to anything on the spot. Works every time!

And, of course, [your new anthem](#), courtesy of the fiery Meghan Trainor. LOVE this song!