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Abstract:	This document offers further information on how to say a positive “no” - related to career development.		
Target Users/Readers:	Early career stage researchers		

The art of saying a positive no

According to William Ury¹ saying NO means that you are saying YES: to your own priorities, to what is important for you.

If you can formulate this “yes” to your priorities, what you want and what’s important for you clearly, saying “no” to distracting obligations becomes much easier.

You should of course also value priorities of your colleagues and keep a good relationship. The following advice will make your conversations constructive and saying “no” will become easier:

1. Make sure you listen carefully to the person approaching you with a request. Express that you understand why the request is important.
2. Take your time, do not answer spontaneously. Say “may I come back to you in XY time”?
3. Prepare well: consider critical reactions in advance (no-one likes a “no” as an answer). Think about what the best way to respond might be.
4. Discuss the options and impacts with friends, a coach or mentor. Roleplay what you want to say, the critical reactions and gain some feedback how your responses might be perceived.
5. Explain your priorities, what is important to you.
6. Be firm but friendly. Explain your “No” but don’t be defensive
7. Suggest alternatives, ask questions that help searching for alternatives (“I understand that this is important for you, ... who/what could help ...?”)
8. Keep your word as soon as you said yes. Your word should be your bond!
If you are realistic in your commitments, you build up credibility and respect.

References

Ury, W. at Microsoft (2016): The Power of a Positive No: How to Say No and Still Get to Yes (55 min)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1lcnRJsAOIU>

Lozeron N. the Power of a Positive “No” summarized in 4 min
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WuS0fySFNl0>

remark: be aware of the gender stereotypes used in the examples 😞

¹ Ury, William: *The Power of a Positive No. How to say No & still get to Yes*. London: Hodder Mobius 2008.