

The act of saying NO

all creatures welcome

This workshop comes from the wonderful Holistic Security training manual CyberWomen created by IWPR (Institute for War and Peace Reporting).

I adapted it to an online format and extended it a bit.

→ **CyberWomen**
(English, Spanish, Arabic)
<https://cyber-women.com>

Who I am

- Web front-end developer, 15+ years
- Debian Developer (emeritus) -
privacy packaging team
- Currently working with Nairobi based
MAMA Network (reproductive health in
sub-saharan Africa)
- Mediator
- Illustrator (“How the Internet Really Works”)

→ My website
<https://curlybracket.net>

Burdens we carry

- Emotional & mental load. Work overload.
- Self guilt for failing to meet deadlines.
- Impostor syndrome, lack of self-confidence.
- Societal pressure on womxn*: take care of the needs of others before their own, always be nice, friendly, caring, understanding, oh, and if possible also be mothers and look sexy at the same time.
- Perfectionism: we learn that we must not make mistakes, that we are not good enough as we are, and that we have to work for recognition.
- We expect validation from the outside, or we feel that we failed.
- Volunteer work and activism
- “If I don’t do it, then who will?”

→ Comic on the mental load <https://english.emmaclit.com/2017/05/20/you-shouldve-asked/>

→ Taibi Kahler’s drivers (“be perfect”, “be nice”, “be strong”, “try hard”, “hurry up”) <https://curlybracket.net/assets/files/Drivers-Antreiber-Questionnaire-Test.odt>

→ Burnout culture <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/how-healing-works/202105/move-burnout-culture-wellness-culture>

This is a workshop format. The idea is to split up to breakout rooms and discuss with each other. The groups will be composed of 2 people.

The discussion itself will only happen in the breakout room, none of it will be shared publicly.

Share with others only what you feel comfortable sharing.

If you are uncomfortable, feel free to say so or to leave the breakout room early.

Exercise, part 1: Reflecting on burdens

Tell each other a story about a time when you wanted to say NO, but you did not, or you could not.

For example, a time when you wanted to say NO to extra work, unpaid work, a favor you were asked, to spend time with someone despite having different plans, to take care of something that was not on your schedule, or to fulfill any other commitment.

8 minutes:

Each person may talk for 4 minutes and then listen to the other person for 4 minutes.

Please try to listen actively, don't comment, don't reflect ("Oh, that happened to me too once!"). Just listen. Consider thanking the other person for sharing their story.

→ Active listening <https://www.seedsforchange.org.uk/activelis-tening>

Welcome back!

I hope it was insightful!

Let's take a short breath and then let's do the second part of the exercise. It will happen in the same break out room, with the same partner.

Exercise, part 2: Rewriting the script

You will now re-tell each other the same story but you will change it as if you had actually said NO.

You don't have to explain or justify yourself when telling this new version of your story. Be kind to yourself.

8 minutes:

Each person may talk for 4 minutes and then listen to the other person for 4 minutes.

Again, when it's your turn to listen, please try to just listen. If there is some time left in the end, feel free to reflect to the other person what you heard, focus on what you found touching and positive.

Welcome back!

How did that feel?

How can you make more space for yourself in the future?

Which other ways to say NO can you come up with?

→ Have you taken on too much? Volunteer Responsibility Amnesty Day is about checking with yourself, and ending the commitments you need to end – maybe by taking a break, or by rotating it on to someone else, or by sunseting a project. <https://www.volunteer-amnestyday.net/>

→ “Saying no doesn’t make you an arse” by Domenica de Grandis <https://ddegrandis.com/saying-no-doesnt-make-you-an-arse/>

How to say NO

- No.
- Thanks for thinking of me, but I'm not available.
- Maybe next time!
- I have another commitment.
- I'm afraid I cannot help you.
- This is not my responsibility/role.
- Regrettably I'm not available right now.

Setting boundaries, imposing your rules:

- I can help you tomorrow/next week/etc.
- I can do this within \$timeframe.
- I can do that. My hourly/daily rate is \$amount.
- I can do that if we re-prioritize my other tasks.

Thank you for your participation!

Feedback:
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