

The Longest Sentence You'll Ever Need to Learn to Say and Mindful Mini-Breaks

Two Helpful Holiday Hints To Use All Year Long

The years go by faster and faster, don't they? And the stressors can pile up more and more each year, can't they? So many folks I talk to say they don't look forward to the year end holiday time, in fact the word "dread" is sometimes mentioned. But it doesn't have to be a dreaded time of year, and it's up to each of us to do what we need to for self care. And that's the key word right there, did you catch it in the last sentence? Yes, it's the word "self." So much is written about the self and related topics to the self - self-esteem, self-concept, self-awareness. We think about and work to improve these self items, the better to navigate through our sometimes difficult and overwhelming lives. Yet out of the word "self" comes the word "selfish" and that word gets a lot of bad press, much of it undeserved.

We are raised not to be selfish. You know the lessons - share your toys, play nicely with other children, don't take the last piece of whatever until you ask if anyone wants it, and so on. Those lessons are always good, and it's important for everyone to learn the world doesn't revolve around each individual and that it's good to be giving to others. But here's where the misinterpretation comes along - some people believe there is NEVER a time to be selfish, and I beg to differ. There are plenty of times in life when it's important to be selfish, because being selfish is required for proper self care. If we don't do proper self care, we have nothing to give to others anyway - that's an important concept I've embraced for myself. Proper self care can be basic simple things like getting enough sleep, making sure we nourish ourselves reasonably, dressing adequately for whatever weather we encounter, remembering to lock our doors and wear our seat belts and pay our bills and try to save some money and a thousand other details of life. Taken to another level, self care also has to do with finding joy in our own lives, to find our own happiness, to shape ourselves into fully functioning and wholly integrated human beings. Again, by doing this work, we are so much better equipped to be for others in our work, our personal lives, our worlds.

Here's another part of being selfish, and the first hint - the longest sentence you'll ever need to learn to say. Ready? Here it is. No. That's right, it's a one-word, completely and grammatically correct sentence. Isn't that amazing? Do you know how many people I've had tell me "it sounds mean" to say no just like that? Do you know how many people I know who think they need to give a reason for saying no? Do you know that as soon as you give a reason for saying no, you've negated your own no and now the person can get you to yes? That's what sales/marketing is all about, how do you think sales/marketing people get you to buy things even when you know you want to say no? Because they know your no isn't really a no, because they can see it in your eyes, and they they hear you hesitate around the no and rather than saying "No," there's more of a "No, because....". See, now they've got you, because your no was not really a no after all, because you were afraid of being "mean." By the way, that's how cults work too, just in case you're ever approached by someone in a certain way. You'll know it if it ever happens to you - it has to me. Can't think of a more appropriate time for the no to be firm, even at the risk of "sounding mean."

Come on, let's practice this, try it out. Someone asks, "Can you drive me to the airport?" Your response? No. Someone asks, "I forgot my wallet. Can I use your credit card to buy something and pay you back later?" Your response? No. Someone asks, "Will you take my shift as classroom mom?" Your response? No. Someone asks, "Do you have time to help me bake cookies?" Your response? No. This next one is for all parents everywhere, bonus points for this round, people! Someone asks, "Can I invite my friend to family dinner so I'll have someone to talk to when you all are having boring conversation?" Your response? No. That last one is a hard one, because those of you who are parents know the child's unrelenting, ceaseless barrage that begins as soon as you say no, that pleading and begging and cajoling and threatening and whatever else they have in their arsenals to get you to change the no. Stay the course, parents, stand your ground. You have every right to your no, and no explanation is required. And here's one for the single folks. Someone says (not even asks, mind you, how's that for guilt-driven expectation and manipulation?), "Oh you're single, so you'll work on the holiday so that everyone else can have time off to be with their families." Your response? The polite one would be no, but I can think of other responses, can't you? Is there an assumption out there that if a person is unmarried and childless, he/she has no life, plans, origin family, preferences, commitments, etc.? Incredibly insulting and presumptuous, in my opinion.

At this time of year, the word no becomes especially important, because it's so easy to get caught up in the whole pressure of what others expect, regardless of marital status or family role or work setting. I appreciate when people say "easier said than done" in response to a "just say no" kind of suggestion. Yes, I know it's easier said than done, but always remember at whose expense when it is not done? That's when the word dread enters the conversation, because now people are saying yes when they really need to say no, and therefore they are overwhelmed by overextending and getting caught up in guilt-driven obligation.

As I mentioned, the word no doesn't only apply to holiday times of year. It's a great one for other occasions all year round. It's a 365 days type tool, feel free to add it to your repertoire and take it out to use whenever you need to. Remember, saying no does not "sound mean." Rather, saying yes when you really mean yes and no when you really mean no is a much more honest and simpler approach to life. No need for explanations, just go with your self-care driven response. Your reward? You get to let go of a huge emotional energy drain and major head space time waster - GUILT! Think of how much more time you would have for yourself and the others you care for when you get rid of guilt. I promise it's worth it.

Here's the other 365 days type tool and holiday tip - take a mental mini-break, any time you want to. It costs you nothing financially, and it comes with tremendous benefits every time you use it. There are two versions of this. For the first one, take a moment to think of the safest place in your life. It can be anywhere. For some people it's their home. For some, it's a specific room in their home. For some, it's their car. It's different for every person. Now think about your schedule, and make a plan to visit that safe place at least once every day, and when you are there, be mindfully in the moment. For example, if your safe place is your car, try driving without playing music. Listen to the noises your car makes, feel the vibrations of the movement of the vehicle and be aware of the sensations of your body as you drive the vehicle. Take some deep breaths as you stay in the moment. If your safe place is your home, try the same thing - no

music, no tv, just sit in the most comfortable spot in your safe place and take a look around. Experience the sensation of your body as it sits in the comfy spot. Look around at the favorite and familiar things that make your home the safe place in your life, and savor the feelings as you stay in the moment.

Now here's the other approach. Do you have a most special place that instantly gives you that special warm glow even when you just say the words out loud? I have more than one, so I use different ones for different times. For some, it's the beach. For some it's in a foreign country, or it's a favorite vacation spot, or it's outside in the woods or in their own back yard. Again, it's different for every person. So here's a little guided imagery for you. Follow along and you'll be taking a mental mini-break right now as you finish reading this article. Wherever you're sitting as you read this, do what you need to for your body to be relaxed and comfortable. Are you fully seated on your chair? Is your computer screen at a comfortable angle for your line of vision? Do you have some privacy (if possible) so you can focus? Once those conditions are set, imagine that most special place in your mind. Do you get the colors, shapes, smells, sights and sounds? Are you there in your mind's eye? Now take a moment to feel your body's sensations. What is your face doing? Are you smiling? Do you have that peaceful feeling of being relaxed in the moment? As I'm writing this article, I'm thinking of one of my most special places and when I go there, I can't help but smile. Just as with learning to incorporate "no" into your life, I promise this will work for you too.

I use both of the above techniques and the word "no" in my daily life. These well-worn tools are taken out regularly and utilized to maintain the balance I strive for in living a contented and happy life. These are my holiday tools for you to use every year and all year round, in the hope that they will become as well-worn in your kit as they are in mine.