Say Yes–Or Say No? What To Do When Faced With The Impossible

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New: Manage Your Project Portfolio: Increase Your Capacity and Finish More Projects
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You're a Developer, Manager, Tester, Project Manager…

* You've got tons of work to do

* Other people interrupt you

* Your manager asks you to take on another project

* You're multitasking!

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Let's See Multitasking in Action

* I need 4 volunteers to do 4 little projects...

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Problems of Multitasking

* Costly

* Confusing

* Impossible to predict

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Costs of Multitasking

* Stopping your current work

* Swapping out the current work

* Swapping in the new work

* …and sometime later, swapping the originally current work back in

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Personal Cost is "Whiplash"

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YES

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Yes Can Get You Into Trouble

* Saying 'Yes' leads you to agree to work you may not have the people or time to do

    * And agreeing to something on the spur of the moment might lead you to agree to something you don't know anything about

* A True Story

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No is a Necessary Tool

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No Can Get You Into Trouble

* If you only say 'No'' or say 'No' in the wrong way or to the wrong project, you can run into political trouble

* A True Story

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Maybe

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Maybe is a Disaster

* The people who want to hear "yes" will hear yes

* The people who want to hear "no" will hear no

* All of those people are your senior managers

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A Little Experiment

* We're going to practice saying some words

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So What Do You Do?

* Communicate in multiple ways

  * Show what's going on

  * Rather than assume the stated project description/ deadline is the only viable possibility, negotiate

    * Use words other than only 'Yes' or 'No'

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Pictures Explain the Problem

* Project portfolios are excellent for explaining what's going on at the lowest level and at the highest level

* As you explain the portfolio, walk your manager through your priorities and how they support your mission

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Combination View: Low and Mid Level

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Project Portfolio: High Level

Month/ Projects	January	February	March	April	May
	Project1	Project1	Project1		
	Project2	Project2	Project2		
Unstaffed Work		Project3	Project3	Project3	
			Project4	Project4	Project4
				Project5	Project5

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A Picture May Not Be Enough

* How do you say "no" right now?

* Discuss together

* We'll debrief together

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Approaches to Say What You Mean

* "Not right now" and offer a new date
* "This is what I can do"
* "Here's what I'm doing—what should I stop doing?"
* Prioritize the work
    * "Show me your current priorities"
* "When do you need this?"

* Describe effects (contract staff required)
* "I can do that and …" describe the effects
* Explain why request makes no sense (be careful)
* "Here are some alternatives."
* "Here are the risks"
* Offer a date for a date

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Prepare for the Conversation

* Talk frequently with your manager
    * You can ask for one-on-ones
* Develop your project portfolio
    * Your project portfolio is your personal backlog

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Convincing Management Multitasking is a Bad Idea

* Speak management's language

* Explain costs

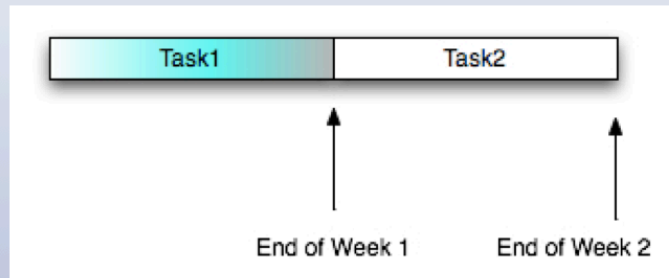* Use the portfolio to explain relative ranking

* Timebox work into chunks

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Speak Management's Language

* Recognize management work is different from technical work
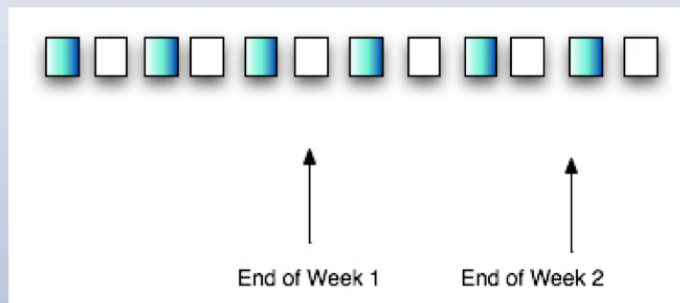
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Show Management Pictures: No Context Switching

| Task1 | Task2 |

End of Week 1   End of Week 2

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Show Management Pictures: With Context Switching

End of Week 1   End of Week 2

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Timeboxes Help Manage Multiple Project Work

* Context-switching during one day is expensive

* Consider

    * One-week iterations

    * One-day iterations

* If you must change projects, wait until the next day

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Chunking

* Better estimates so you can break work into smaller pieces

    * Separate sizing from duration

* Building a ranked product backlog even if it's a personal product backlog

* Integrating testing with development so you don't have to return to work much later

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Guidelines for Accepting More Work

* It's strategically important work for you and the organization

* You can do the work

* If not, has to be on your not-to-do list or unstaffed work list

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Your Yes's and No's Can Work

* Know what you have to do: develop and maintain a portfolio

  * Your personal backlog

  * What's unstaffed work

* Think about how to say No

* Build a relationship with your manager before you have the requests

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There's More...

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