

# 'No' is your most powerful time management tool

**Robyn Pearce**



*Stage your own revolution, say no*

**Y**ou've probably come back to work after your long summer holidays with firm intentions that this time you *will* manage your commitments better. Yet, a few weeks into the term, you might be wondering what happened!

It seems that nearly everyone wrestles with this issue and none more than the people who like to be busy, involved and contributory in their daily activities – and I include myself in that group.

It was useful to remind myself the other day about the first tip on the back of my business card: *"The No. 1 Tip: 'No is your most powerful time management tool."*

Why was I reminded of that?

I must confess to being a bit of an ideas girl – easily enthused by great new possibilities. I'd just had a very interesting conversation with an American company that has created an interactive mobile or iPad application for books such as mine. I *SO* wanted to engage their services!

But common sense prevailed. We have several other projects on the go which are not yet finished. And a number of them, when done, will create elements that could support this very innovative software.

As I listened to the eloquent young man on the other end of the Skype call extol the virtues of the opportunity my gut instinct kicked in. Despite the potential benefits, it was time to listen to my own advice – to slow down, take the helicopter (or strategic) view and ask myself:

- Could this be a useful component in our long-term objectives?
- Will it add value?
- Will it add profit?
- Have we got time to implement?
- Have we got the resources to do the project now?

The answers to the first two questions were yes, the third was yes if marketed correctly, but – the answers to the last two, for the foreseeable future, were NO!

A commitment then would have meant spending \$1000 immediately. But the money, although important, was the least of the issues. Time and available resources are almost always a far bigger issue, plus what happens if we can't follow through.

Every time we over-commit we cause fragmentation on many levels. We divert our energy and resources, don't get things done in a timely way, feel bogged down and over-loaded, often waste the opportunity and even worse, dilute the effect of whatever else is in progress.

So I listened to my gut instinct – which said 'DON'T':

If you recognise yourself in this story you might like to ask yourself:

- Are there any areas in my life where I've over-committing?
- What are the consequences – to others around me as well as myself?
- If I chop back on some things, what will be the result?

# time management

- What will happen if I increase focus on activities currently in the pipeline?

## A case study

As I was about to speak at a teachers' conference last year a woman came rushing up to the front of the room to chat.

"You made a huge difference to my sister," she said.

"Really," I replied in some surprise.

"Yes. At a public seminar in a regional centre about six months ago you challenged her behavior. You said what the family has been saying for ages, and she'd been ignoring us. However – and we're absolutely delighted – she listened to you and has made some significant changes."

As she described her sister's story the incident came back into my memory.

We'd been discussing how we could carve out 'me time' – what I call 'sanity gaps'. Then the lady under discussion put her hand up.

"I don't have time for sanity gaps," she said, almost as a badge of honour. She then went on to detail the tasks scheduled for that afternoon, once the course had finished. It was a crazily long list of small details, most of which were being done *for* others, many of them volunteer activities that she'd become deeply involved in.



I'm not usually blunt with participants but I found myself saying:

- When will you have time to eat?
- Who else who can do some of these tasks?
- Why are you running around after all these other people?

Sometimes we get addicted to being available for everyone else and forget to look after ourselves. Could that have happened to you?

She took it in good part and laughed, as did

the rest of the group, the discussion went on and I forgot the dialogue – until her sister bounced up with such excitement six months later.

Apparently, from that day the lady in question started to say "No" and/or to push back (in appropriate ways) to tasks and activities that weren't part of her 'Big Picture', her list of goals and targets. The spin-off was that she felt less pressured, the activities she was really interested in were implemented more effectively, and she gave others the chance to make contributions by not being so available. Her family was delighted – they felt as though they'd got back their mother, sister, wife. And she got back her life.

Focus is a precious and vital skill which helps us get great results and a feeling of control.

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**Robyn Pearce** helps exhausted overloaded teachers find more time, control their paperwork and get home earlier.

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