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How to politely refuse additional work responsibilities

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You are a rockstar at your office. You are on every project that comes in, and your colleagues always need your opinion on the work they are doing. Your boss barely has a meeting without you present in there, and you are working on each project that comes in. Awesome! You are an asset to your company. But here is the problem. You know that you have way more on your plate than what you signed up for. While the praises that keep coming in are motivating enough, there's a limit that you can do. Besides, it is not fair that just because you are efficient, you are pulled in for every work, which ideally is under other people's responsibilities.



So, what do you do every time when work gets piled and your to-do list for the day becomes longer than all your colleagues' to-do list for a month. Should you simply refuse to take on a new project? The answer is yes. You need to refuse additional work responsibilities. In fact, learning to say 'no' and politely turning down a proposal or offer is an important communication skill that you need to learn and use effectively. The key is to be polite when you are saying NO and refusing to take on additional work responsibilities.

How do you do that? I know you are wondering how to say no to a work responsibility that my boss or a senior has assigned to me. Given the fact that you are already overworked, all you must do is put forth that idea in a very polite and professional manner. Whenever someone tries to loop you in, you can say any of the following phrases.

. "I would really love to help you with this (project/ task), but I really need to get this (project name) finished by the end of this week. I need to completely focus on meeting the deadline, so I am sorry, I don't think I can get on with this new project."

. "I am already working extra time on my current project, and I have a couple lined up after that. I will be free after (mention date), if you still need me to work on the project by then, please let me know."

. "I would have loved to take on a project like this. It sure sounds exciting. I really wish I could help

you with it, but I am terribly tied up right now. I am sorry, but I will have to turn it down."

. "If I had slightly less on my plate, I would have eagerly taken up your project. I know that intern/ colleague (name of the person) is eager to take up a new project and I am positive he will definitely help you out." [Say this only when you know of a person who will be willing to work on the project]

The key and the trend in all these responses is that you start with something positive and show that you are or would be keen to take on the project, and then politely turn it down. Give alternatives whenever you can. It saves you from saying a direct NO, and also saves your reputation!

-By Shailja Varma

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