

THE POWER OF NO

By Olga Sheean

Once upon a time there was a man called George. George liked to please others and so he said yes every time he was asked for help or money. He said yes whenever someone wanted to borrow his car, even if it meant he had to walk to work. George said yes to fast-food super-sizing, to overtime, to babysitting for friends, to abuse from his wife and to a demotion at work. He said yes to chemotherapy when he got stomach cancer and he said yes to some experimental new drugs. The only time George ever said no was when the nurse in palliative care asked him if he had enjoyed his life. George never experienced the power of no and, as a result, no one ever experienced the power of George.

'No' is probably the most powerful word we have in our vocabulary. Although it is often used to tell us what we cannot have, do or be, as children, it is a word that can define who we truly are. 'No' can be used to create a healthy boundary, to reflect a personal value, to reject a compromise, to end abuse, or to exit a situation or relationship that no longer serves us. It can represent the deepest truth, even when it seems like the hardest thing to say. Saying no can set people free, demonstrating strength and clarity of purpose. And saying no to whatever is not working for you is the most powerful way to start attracting what you really want. 'No' can cut through a multitude of excuses, justifications, defenses—many of which tend to complicate our lives and get us increasingly enmeshed in unhealthy situations.

So why is it so difficult for us to use this monosyllable, even when saying yes to someone else often means saying no to a better relationship, a healthier body, and a more fulfilling life? What are we afraid of when we say no?

We all want to be loved or accepted, and we're often afraid of hurting others' feelings in case it backfires on us or leads to a confrontation. But being able to say no to others means being able to say yes to yourself, which requires strong self-acceptance and self-worth.

Saying no can be a healthy shortcut to getting what you want, particularly in unfulfilling relationships. Yet many of us take the long way around, hedging our bets, trying to be tactful, and effectively postponing our happiness by opting for "I don't know", "Maybe later", "I'll call you..." or "I need some time..."

When we vacillate (even though our heart often knows what it wants), our ambivalence generates similar dynamics in our relationships—bringing us partners who can't commit, who don't know what they want, or who shy away from deeper intimacy. Our failure to be up front and honest—with ourselves as much as others—is guaranteed to result in lukewarm love.

Think about the areas in your life where you're currently avoiding saying no, and ask yourself why you're still hovering in the stagnant grey realms of indecision. There is nearly always something we must say no to first, before we can say yes to what we really want. Make a strong choice and say no to whatever is not working for you—in your relationships, your career, your lifestyle or your dreams. Give yourself permission to go for what you want and to start living life on your terms. Doing so will not only bring you new opportunities and greater fulfillment, it will also show you just how much you've been compromising all along.

*Olga Sheean is an author, coach and therapist specializing in enlightened relationships, personal empowerment and holistic self-mastery. Her book, *Fit for Love—find your self and your perfect mate*, is a power-packed illustrated workbook that takes readers on a journey of self-discovery, healing and empowerment. See www.olgasheean.com.*