

CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

Say Yes

By Douglas E. Welch

When dealing with your clients in the high-tech world, it is so much easier to say no than yes. I'm pretty sure it has something to do with my years in corporate IS/MIS/IT departments, but, over the years, I have found myself becoming more and more of a gatekeeper, determined to keep new technology from complicating my job and my client's life. Despite whatever noble intentions I might have had, though, this year I am determined to say yes to my clients as often as possible.

A New Attitude

This year, I am making a concerted effort to avoid the automatic rejection of complicated, difficult, or even silly requests from my clients. I realize that over the years I have been limiting myself, my career, and my business by limiting clients' options. If they want to keep complete duplicates of all their data on three different machines, so be it. If they want to install the latest, greatest wireless networking in their home even though it's a completely unnecessary expense, so be it.

Now, this is not to say that I don't explain all the nasty things that can happen or the problems that might occur in their plans. I very carefully lay out all the issues involved with their plans but, in the end, my response is: "There are issues, but if that is what you want, then we will make it happen." Clients are, after all, a very important part of the equation.

It might not surprise you to find that one major result of this new attitude is happier clients. This is not to say that my clients weren't happy with my work before, but part of the reason they hire me is to make things happen. They don't want a debate over what is appropriate or feasible. They have an image in their heads of how things should work and are asking me to make that image a reality. After dealing with clients in this way for a few weeks, I find them more accepting of true roadblocks and bugs we might run up against. They are also scheduling me for more hours than they might have in the past. They have

seen openness in my attitude and responded with a further openness of their own.

By curbing my initial inclination to say no, I am now delving more deeply into what my client is trying to accomplish. In some cases, they may not know how to express what they are really after. What may sound like a crazy project might turn out to be easily achievable with off-the-shelf parts once you talk about it for a while. If you don't put up a roadblock right away, you can usually find out the heart of what the client needs, and then develop a solution.

Start Saying Yes Today

I think you will find that having "yes," or at least not having "no," as your first response could open up some high-tech career doors that might have been closed to you in the past. In times like these, you need to be more open to job opportunities than ever before. Shutting down discussion with unequivocal responses can limit your ability to craft elegant solutions to meet your client's needs.

This is *not* to say that you should open yourself up to every hare-brained scheme that comes your way. If you truly think that something is untenable or impossible, then you need to say so. There are some projects to which you should say no. The goal is to curb your initial negative response. This lets the client know that you have heard their idea, and it gives you time to formulate some sort of response without simply saying no. In most cases, you will have to discuss the client's need more fully to discern the true nature of their request, but you won't have simply shut down discussion of the project at the start.

The very nature of a high-tech career leads us all to become technology gatekeepers, attempting to protect our clients against the vagaries of bad or simply useless technology. While this is certainly an important role, we all need to look for possibilities before ending any discussion. Try to say yes a bit more this year—to your clients, to your family and to yourself. You might find that everyone will feel a bit better—and the benefits to your high-tech career could be substantial. □

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