

IT'S OK TO SAY "NO"

HOW TO SAY "NO" WITHOUT LOSING YOUR JOB OR DAMAGING A RELATIONSHIP

Saying "no" for some people can be a very difficult and uncomfortable thing to do. What if I told you that the people best at saying "no" to poor uses of their time never actually have to say it? What they say instead is that they have something else planned, and they do.

If you were to invite me to a backyard barbeque and I were to tell you that I was out of town at a wedding that weekend, would you accept that answer as a "no"? If you were my boss and you asked me to do something that you needed done today, and I told you I am scheduled to be in a seminar all day, would you accept that answer as a "no"?

You say no to things all day long without realizing it. When you devote your time to any one task or activity, you are in essence saying no to everything else you could be doing at that same time. For example, if you and I were in a meeting together, you would in effect be saying no to phone calls, emails, other meetings

and interruptions during that time. You would also be saying no to vacations, time with family, friends, pets, hobbies, being at the beach and a million other things. Every time you say yes to one thing, by default, you say no to everything else. The key to success is not getting better at saying no; it's getting better at saying yes to the right things.

There seems to be an unwritten rule when it comes to requesting a person's time. If they already have something planned for the time you're requesting, then you try to find another time that will work. Not all the time (adjustments can always be made), but when you request someone's time and they make reference to a written plan or even pull it out and show it to you, how do you respond? I'll bet, like many of us, you start discussing a time they don't have planned for their help.

Why do we show such respect for someone who has planned their time in writing? When we plan, we are committing in advance to the time

required to complete the plan. We have considered what needs to be done, prioritized the list, made decisions about when each task will be completed and even taken the time to write it down so we don't forget.

This is not easy to do, and it's not always fun, but we all know it's when we are most effective. This is why so much respect is given to someone who has their time planned.

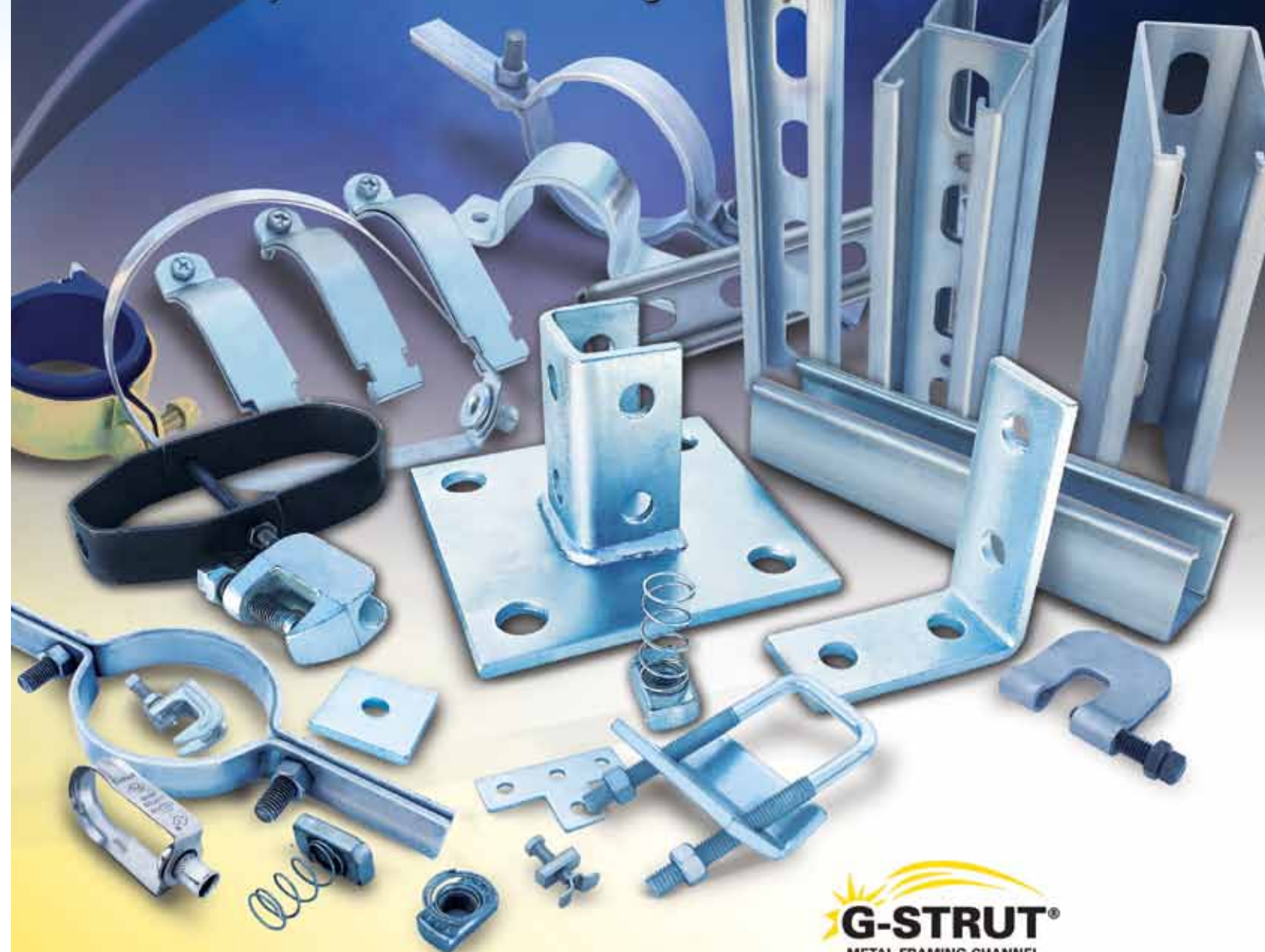
Event and meeting planners understand the importance of this concept. Have you ever gotten a post-card in the mail that says "save the date"? The reason you are receiving such a card is because the sender knows that when an event is planned and/or scheduled on your calendar, it is more likely to happen because it is easier for you to defend. When someone requests your time for that same time, you will most probably say, "I'm sorry, I am out of town at a wedding that weekend."

Have you ever had someone ask

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“What are you doing Monday night?” or ask what you were doing at a certain time without telling you why they were asking? The reason this happens, and it seems to happen to all of us, is because unplanned time is more difficult to defend. If you were to ask me what I was doing this weekend and I said “I don’t think I have anything,” it would be very difficult to say no to what you were asking me to do, even if it were to come over and watch paint dry.

People believe that if your time was important, you would have it planned. If what you’re doing is not planned, then how important can it be? For this reason, they believe that if you don’t have a plan, whatever they bring to you should be given greater importance.

When you have a plan, it gives you choices. If a request for your time is a higher priority than what you have planned, it may require some shifting of priorities (especially if what you have planned involves other people), but you can certainly make the appropriate adjustments.

But if the opportunity is a poor use of your time, having a plan gives you a socially acceptable way of saying no. Planning your day provides you with choices; it doesn’t limit them. It’s much easier and more socially acceptable to say you have something else planned than to just say no to someone. I’m not suggesting that you just say you have something else planned, but that you actually *do*. I even suggest in some cases (your boss for instance) showing the other person your plan so they can see it.

So what in your life is worth defending? What is worth taking the time to plan and schedule? What would make your life better, reduce your stress, move your business forward or improve a relationship? Is it exercise, creating a budget,

finding a mentor, scheduling date night, benchmarking the competition, networking or enrolling in a training class? If these things are not planned and scheduled, I can guarantee you they won’t happen. Take the time to plan and start saying yes to the right things before you find yourself caught up in doing the wrong things. **CS**

Steve McClatchy is president of Alleeer Training & Consulting and the author of the award winning, *New York Times* Bestseller *Decide: Work Smarter, Reduce Your Stress and Lead by Example*. Steve provides keynotes and workshops on the topics of Leadership, Time Management, Consultative Selling and New Business Development. Learn more at www.Alleeer.com, e-mail Steve@Alleeer.com or call (800) 860-1171.



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