

THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



1311 When Should You Say “No” to Your Boss?

Is there a right time to tell your manager “No, sorry, I can’t do what you’re asking me to do”? Today’s commentary is going to make a lot of people nervous. I’m Jerry Roberts, and that’s coming next on The Extra Point.

Saying no at work is hard. It’s scary. You don’t want to let your boss down. You don’t want to get in trouble. Will you lose a chance at a promotion? Will you lose your job?

It really doesn’t matter if you’re new to the workplace or you’ve been at it for decades, refusing your boss’s request is likely to get your heartbeat up. Still, there are times when that may be warranted. Let’s explore this topic and see where it takes us.

How about when you’re asked to work outside of your actual job description — should you decline?

I was told a few days ago that this is common in government positions, both GovGuam and the federal government. Workers just say no.

Even if it’s written somewhere that you don’t have to exceed your job description, I’d be looking to make sure that it’s okay that I do.

Think about it. If the boss is short of help and maybe on a deadline, and it looks like the operation is going to come up short, am I really going to wave my job description under his/her nose and shake my head?

In my opinion, the only legit answer is along the lines of, “I’m not sure I’m qualified to do what you need done, but I’m game to help the team in any way I can.” I want to help, and I want people to know they can count on me when things really matter.

Imagine you’re on leave and want to enjoy your time away from work. Do you put your phone on “do not disturb” or do you leave it on as normal, just in case somebody needs your help to solve a problem?

If I’m the absolute only person who can give the answer, that’s either by design or a failure of leadership. Unless it’s a critical issue that is super top secret, why am I be the only person who can deal with the problem?

I believe in having reasonable boundaries and fair expectations on how much I need to be in communication with my employer while I’m away. That being said, what if a client or a vendor calls and needs my specific assistance? Am I okay with that person being told, “Sorry, Jerry will be back in three weeks and doesn’t want to be disturbed”? It seems to me that clients and vendors have fair and reasonable expectations, too.

Maybe you’re saying to yourself, “Well, I see where this is going. Jerry would never say no to a boss.” Actually, there are instances when I’d be doing that.

The first is more of an advisory than it is a rejection. If I was asked to do a job and upon assessing that the chances of succeeding were low or non-existent, I’d be upfront that I’d give it everything I have, but I don’t see a good outcome. Then, the boss could decide whether or not to move forward.

The second situation is if my lack of skills made it highly likely that I or someone else would be put at risk in terms of physical safety if I took on the job.

The third time I’d say no is if I was asked to do something unethical. If you’ve followed this program for a while, you may know that I once did refuse an order to lie to a client.

I was working as a manager in California, and the owner of the company regretted a deal he had made years before. At a dinner I attended with the competitor of this client, my boss made a deal that violated that agreement. In short order, the first client discovered what was happening and called me with all of the facts. (Con’t.)

I informed my boss and he told me to tell the client he was wrong, that we hadn't violated the deal.

I refused on three counts. One, we were wrong to go back on our word. Two, the man had all of the evidence. Three, I wasn't going to lie to him. Not only was that wrong as well, it would only serve to insult his intelligence and infuriate him.

What happened? I got fired. Later, I found out that my then-former boss had told the client that the whole thing had been my fault and that he let me go when he found out.

Who told me that? The client, whom I had given my home phone in case he ever needed to reach me after hours. Yeah, it was before cell phones. He thanked me for playing it straight with him and wished me well.

So yes, there are times when I think it's right to tell the boss no.

For the most part, however, I like to be a part of a solution. I hope you do, too.

That's the Extra Point. Be responsible and make something good happen today. For 93.3 and the Ray Gibson Show, I'm Jerry Roberts.

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