The Art of Saying No

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Discussion

How Are You Organized?

- How many of you work as part of an agile team, with coders, product owners and the like all sharing the responsibility to deliver value?

- How many of you are part of separate testing teams?

- What other configurations do you participate in?

Work Entry In Scrum

- People write stories or requirements of varying quality,

- Those stories are evaluated and cleaned up,

- Updated, well-formed stories are added to the backlog,

- Once on the backlog, stories are prioritized (and re-prioritized), and

- In time, stories are pulled into a sprint.

- The product owner owns the backlog and the prioritization process. They work with the team to determine when an item is to be done.

Sometimes

The work entry process allows anyone to give work to the team at any time, work they tackle based on their perception of value, urgency, and importance.

While this sounds crazy, ad-hoc work entry is more common than most leaders know!

Impact Of Lack Of Work Entry Discipline

- **Disrupted work** – Pushing new work into the team after planning is an interruption. Interruptions disrupt the current flow of work and thought within a team.

- **Everything else is late** – When a team is asked to deal with the new piece of work outside of a standard work entry process, other items that are currently being addressed will have to be stopped for some period of time.

- **Reduced trust** – The worst impact of undisciplined work entry process is a loss of trust between team members, teams, stakeholders, and leadership.

- Cost goes up, quality goes down, and lots of people get yelled at.

8 Most Common Work Entry Problems

- Difference in goals

- Need outstrips supply

- Pay practices

- Product v Project

- Urgency/importance dichotomy

- Class of services

- Control

- Yes – The single word yes is at the root of most work entry problems.

Just Say No Or Face --

- **Lack of empowerment** – The inability to say no is a reflection of individuals or teams that do not have the tools or power to regulate the work they are asked to perform.

- **Tyranny of the urgent** – Urgency can obscure what is important.

- **Elevation of the loudest voice in the room** – The squeaky wheel gets the attention that would be better spent with other stakeholders.

- **Burn out** – Saying yes to everything leads to 25 hour days (it is possible) causing emotional, mental, and physical exhaustion.

EXERCISE

Scenarios Why Is No Is Hard!

- Break into groups of 3 or 4.

- Draft a scribe for each team.

- Brainstorm situations where saying no is hard or impossible. (4 Minutes)

- Pick the three most untenable and be ready to brief to the room. (4 Minutes)

- Debrief (5 ish minutes)

How To Say No

- **Step 1: Understand**!
  Step back and listen to what you are being asked to do. Listening delivers value in multiple ways including demonstrating that you are taking the request seriously, have empathy for the requestor and it provides time to gather the data needed to answer the request.

  Considerations and suggestions:
  - *Don't say yes as a tool to buy time to say no*. Leads to feelings of betrayal.
  - Take the time you need to parse and understand the request, your needs, and desires. Don't fall prey to the impending action.
  - Use techniques such as Socratic questioning to gather the data needed to make an informed choice and to provide context when giving a response.

Digging Deeper With Socratic Questions

- Socratic questioning is an approach to teaching developed to Socrates (philosopher, mathematician, and teacher – 470 BC to 399 BC).

- The teacher takes an ignorant position so that student takes the higher, more knowledgeable position in the search for an answer.

- The approach could be ultra summarized as: ask questions, don't give answers. The teacher needs to ask questions that lead a student to discover a solution.

- Needs to lead to an actionable or influenceable outcome.

Types of Socratic Questions

- **Questions That Probe Concepts** – Questions to help learners to clarify and go deeper into the question they are asking

- **Questions about the Question** – Reflect questions back to the learner by asking them to test why they are asking the specific question.

- **Questions That Probe Implications and Consequences** – Get the learner to highlight and evaluate the logical implications of their ideas.

- **Questions about Viewpoints or Perspectives** – Ask the learner to consider other viewpoints.

- **Questions That Probe Information, Reasons, Evidence, and Causes** – Probe the underlying facts and the logical basis and rationale of their arguments.

Types of Socratic Questions, Part 2

- **Questions That Probe Assumptions** – Challenge assumptions and supports an argument rather than assuming them as given.

- **Questions That Probe Inferences and Interpretations** – These types of questions focus on the learner to probe emerging conclusions.

- **Questions That Probe Purpose** – These questions help the learner to understand the justification question and role of the question in the learning process.

- **Questions of Clarification** – This type of question asks the learner to understand and share more information about the questions they are asking.

Don't Use Socratic Questions…

- To lead or manipulate someone negatively. <u>Christopher Hurney</u> wrote, "often I think my attempt at Socratic questions are actually leading questions … and leading questions, IMO, risk coming off as a bit condescending."

- To belittle OR FRUSTRATE others. I can't think of a reason for using a Socratic Dialog to make someone think less of themselves.

- To avoid answering a question asked multiple times.

Biases Leading to Yes'itus:
Anchor Bias

- **Anchor bias** refers to the tendency to rely heavily on one piece of information when making decisions. This bias is often seen when early estimates for a project or tasks are made. The instant they are placed on the table they become a reference point to which all changes will be compared.

Impact Example(s)

1. Can you test this project in two weeks?

2. If I know if it is -12F I am going to feel cold no matter what it says on the thermostat.

Behavior: Bandwagon Effect

- The **bandwagon effect** occurs when there is a tendency to adopt an idea because the crowd does. For example, when an idea is shown on the cover of all the industry journals, teams tend to take it up with gusto.

Impact Example(s)

1. The media (classic and new media) amplify ideas making them seem like everyone is doing them (e.g. Agile, Lean, CMMI, Six Sigma).

2. My mother always used to ask if my friends jumped off the roof would I follow them?

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Biases Leading to Yes'itus:
Illusion of Control

- This bias is called the **illusion of control,** which is defined as the tendency to overestimate one's (or a team's) degree of influence over external events.

Impact Example(s)

1. Many test managers believe they can make up for getting code from the developers late.

2. Do you ever turn off a football game so your team will win?

Biases Leading to Yes'itus:
Illusion of Transparency

- **Illusion of transparency** is a bias in which an individual overestimates another individual's ability to know them, and/or overestimate their own ability to understand what is driving someone else.

Impact Example(s)

1. Johari Window indicates that there is always part of a team that we do not understand.

2. Teams, like dance partners, only think they know how their partner will react.
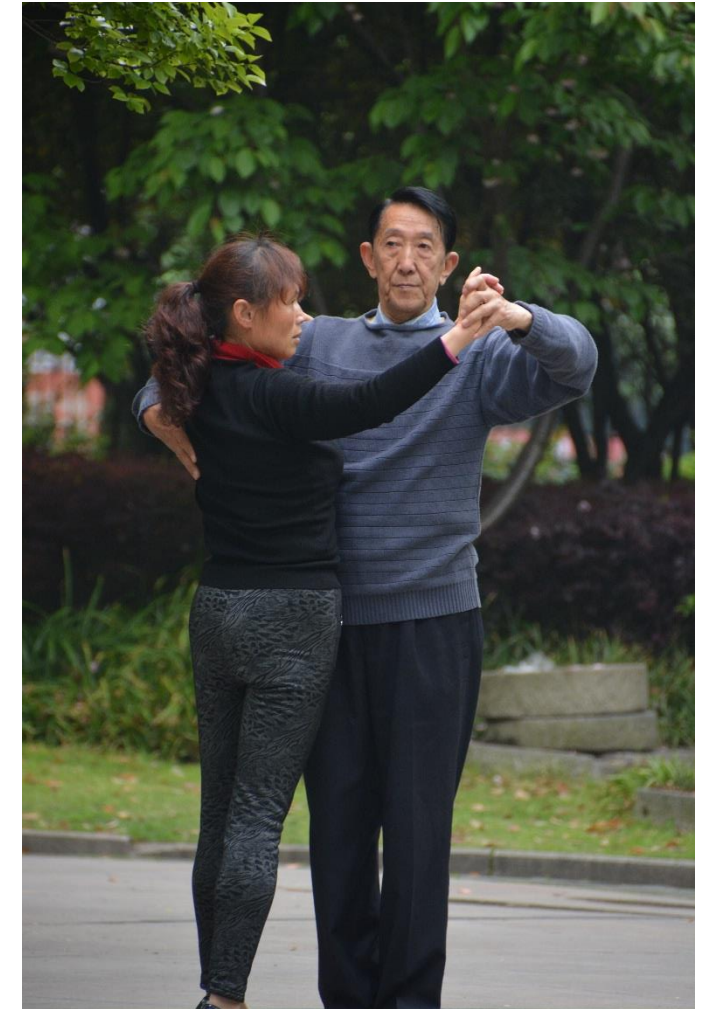
Coaching Technique: Clean Language

- Developed by David Grove

- Focuses attention on the metaphors people use in their language. Example: 'All the world's a stage'

- Clean Language uses the casual metaphors that occur naturally in speech to reveal the hidden depths of our thought processes.

- Clean Language brings thoughts we have not been conscious of into our awareness, where they can be shared and enjoyed - and understood.

- All about the questions!

Clean Language Process

- Listen attentively.

- Keep your opinions and advice to yourself as far as possible.

- Ask Clean Language questions to explore a person's metaphors (or everyday statements).

- Listen to the answers and then ask more Clean Language questions about what the other person has said.

A Few Types of Clean Language Questions

Developing Questions

- "(And) what kind of X (is that X)?"

Sequence and Source Questions

- "(And) then what happens? or (And) what happens next?"

Intention Questions

- "(And) what would X like to have happen?

How To Say No

- **Step 1.5 ish Negotiate (optional)**

- Negotiation helps to define the requestor's value proposition for the work which provides additional insight for a decision. This process only works if both sides of the transaction have wiggle room and can compromise.

  Considerations and suggestions:
  - Ask for help prioritizing the work currently on your plate in relation to the work you are being asked to perform.
  - Offer alternative approaches or tradeoffs. For example, can the due date be changed or perhaps, can the work be broken into iterative components.
  - Recognize that negotiations can fail and that you need to be willing to say and stick with no.

How To Say No

- **Step 2: Respond**

- Give an honest, straightforward answer. No one is happy to be refused, it ok for them to be unhappy, you are not responsible for their happiness.

   Considerations and suggestions:
   - Don't make false excuses.
   - Separate the refusal from rejection.
   - If necessary, help adjust the requester's expectations for the future based on your capabilities and responsibilities.

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EXERCISE

Role Playing Practice Saying No

1. Break into groups of 3 or 4
2. Pick one of the scenarios that are hard to say "no" when asked
3. Pick a person that will ask group to perform the action. Role play asking the team to perform the action.
4. Team: Using Socratic Questions or Clean Language (cheat sheet), develop an understanding of what is driving the ask and then say no OR negotiate for a different outcome.
5. Share obserations.

Summary

- Control of work entry is critical

- Saying No is part of controlling work entry

- Gain understanding before you respond

- Negotiate if needed

- Respond and don't prevaricate!

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Background:

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- SPC4, CSM, CPFS Certifications
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