
The Yes Window

Decide what you're saying yes to before the asks start

A good operator doesn't approve every request as it lands, they set capacity in advance and know what they can absorb before Monday even starts. Most of us run our weeks the opposite way, saying yes reactively to whatever's asked loudest, in the moment, with no sense of what we've already committed. By Thursday you've said yes to a work trip, a bake sale, and a last-minute favor, and no idea how you got there. The yes window is deciding in advance, once a week, what you actually have room to say yes to, so your no isn't a last resort, it's a decision you already made.

What you need: 5 minutes at the start of the week, before the first ask lands.

The steps

1. **Name your capacity for the week.** (1 minute) Rough and honest: full, tight, or actually some room. Not aspirational, actual.
2. **Pick one category you'll say yes to.** (1 minute) Kid asks, work asks, favors for others, extra social plans. One category gets your yes this week, the rest default to "let me check."
3. **Write your default no line.** (1 minute) One sentence you can say without deliberating. "Let me check and get back to you" buys time without a real-time yes.
4. **Decide your one exception rule.** (1 minute) What would make you say yes outside the category anyway. Emergency, once-a-year thing, something that genuinely matters. Naming the exception in advance keeps you from inventing one for everything.
5. **Reread it before the week gets loud.** (1 minute) Tape it somewhere you'll see it, or just glance at it Wednesday when the asks start piling up.

This week's window

My capacity this week

The category I'm saying yes to

My default no line

My one exception rule

When it goes sideways

You say yes to something outside the window anyway. Notice it, don't spiral about it. One exception isn't a failed system, it's a data point for next week's window.

Your default no line feels rude to say out loud. It isn't, "let me check and get back to you" is a completely normal sentence. Practice it once in the mirror if it helps, it gets easier by the third use.

Everyone in your life expects an instant yes and pushes back on the delay. That pushback is exactly what the window is protecting you from. Hold the line for a week and watch how the asks start coming in differently.

A yes you decided on Monday feels completely different from a yes you got talked into on Thursday.