

“The Power of a Positive No: How to Say No and *Still* Get to Yes”, by William Ury, Bantam Dell, New York, New York, March 2007

Reviewed by: Rossi Ray-Taylor, President and CEO

In the third of a trilogy, William Ury, author of the best sellers “Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In” (with Roger Fisher) and “Getting Past No: Negotiating with Difficult People”, again draws on his vast experience in international diplomacy and mediation, business and corporate consulting and personal relationships to give sound advice. An underlying theme of all three books is the importance of interest based negotiations and the strength of building relationships. These he grounds firmly in a goal centered, outcome focused and purposeful approach. In his latest book Ury offers a model of “Yes! – No – Yes?” The first Yes! is the true values that one is affirming by saying No and thereby opening the opportunity for and giving an invitation to a better Yes? in the end.

Ury asserts that there are times in which you have to “stand up for what counts, satisfy your needs or those of others ... [by saying No] to a demand or request that is unwelcome, a behavior that is inappropriate or abusive, or a situation or system that is not working or not fair.” (p. 9) Ury defines the positive No as one that respects the other and listens to, reflects, and acknowledges his or her position and interests. He contracts a positive No as a *shield* that protects you or your interests without hurting the other. A negative No is a *sword* of rejection. “To protect without rejecting – that is the essence of a Positive No”. (p. 144)

“A ‘No’ uttered from deepest conviction is better and greater than a “Yes” merely uttered to please, or what is worse, to avoid trouble.” Mahatma Gandhi

To understand your true values and interests the author describes the “three great gifts of No”. He invites the readers to ask themselves...

- “What am I seeking to *create* by saying No? What other activity or person am I wanting to say Yes to?
- What am I seeking to *protect* by saying No? What core interest of mine is at risk if I say Yes or simply continue to accept the other’s behavior?
- What am I seeking to *change* by saying No? What is wrong with the other’s current behavior (or the situation) and what would be improved if that behavior (or situation) changed?” P. 37.

Once you have identified the Yes!, and given the No, Ury says that it is essential to propose a Yes? This Yes? is an invitation to mutual resolution and an opportunity to open another door. The invitation may be to a third option, it may be a constructive request to change behavior or simply a request for mutual respect of one another’s position.

It is fairly easy to think of countless situations in which application of a positive No is needed: From the negotiation table between labor and management, to student and teacher, to family, to purchase and seller, to boss and employee relationships. The book is full of examples from all of these sectors and more.

Once you have uncovered the Yes you have accomplished three things:

- *“It grounds you in something positive.* You can now stand on your feet without standing on their toes. Your No can be *for* your needs, not *against* the other. Instead of rejecting the other by saying No, you can simply say Yes to what matters most to you.
- *It gives you a sense of direction.* You now know where you are going with your No.
- *It gives you energy.* You now have the fuel to deliver your No and to sustain it in the face of resistance.” P. 49

Once again William has penned a book full of practical and useful ideas that are firmly grounded in values and respect. He teaches the reader that you can say No and still get to Yes. That is a powerful lesson.