

Permission

Throughout your personal and professional lives there will be times when it's necessary to seek permission. There are all kinds of permissions but usually this request for permission comes in the form of asking to be excused from something. The necessity of asking can be driven by a variety of elements:

- Emergencies
- Personal or professional
- Opportunities, planned or unexpected
- Desires, preferences, wants and wishes

While this is not intended to be an exhaustive or comprehensive list, it represents a large portion of why people find themselves needing permission to do one thing or another. Whether the permission you seek is for exemption, substitution or delay, the act of seeking permission is still relatively the same. This "treatise" is not intended to be anything other than advice on how to make a decision when you encounter this issue and how your handling of permission issues, the response you receive and the consequences of your actions are all intertwined.

Why are you seeking permission?

Seeking permission is the responsible and professional thing to do. Generally, the need to seek permission for something results from a conflict. Sometimes that conflict is created outside any influence you can have on the matter, but often that conflict is self-imposed. Determining the mitigating circumstances that creates the need to seek permission must be the first step in resolution.

How was the conflict created?

There are a variety of types of conflicts that create the need to seek permission.

Emergencies are at the top of the list. Only you can determine the extent of an emergency, but there are some common-sense guidelines. Life, death and health situations in your family or with a significant other absolutely qualify as emergencies. No reasonable and compassionate person will ever deny you permission to miss an event based on this reason. We've all been there and absolutely recognize that often, instantaneous decisions must be made that override all other events. Simple notification at the earliest possible time is all that's necessary to justify these unplanned and unfortunate events. Text message, email is all that's necessary with follow up at a later time.

On the other hand, a routine appointment or visit to the doctor or to accompany a friend does not necessarily constitute an emergency. Admittedly, there is enormous gray area between the extremes. Ultimately, you have to decide; but whatever you decide, be prepared to justify your decision, recognizing that someone may disagree with you about whether it really constituted an emergency.

Personal or professional conflicts occur with active and busy people. The more you do, the more the inevitability of these conflicts arising and having to be dealt with. You should not avoid being busy!! However, you should be aware of potential conflicts that may occur well enough in advance to explore all options that are available to you. A good plan is to look as far forward as you have events scheduled to determine which of 3 categories your events fall under: events over which you have no control of scheduling, events over which you are committed to doing but have some flexibility or alternative options, events over which you have total control. Start with the first, adapt the second and fill in with the third.

If you find yourself with too many in the first category then you need to review your priorities and commitments.

Do your homework. If you've been a regular part of a group that you know will have performances, yet you're unaware of future schedules (i.e. semester to semester), there are still many ways to plan. You know they're going to happen and you can find out. That information exists, you must try to find it. If you can't, then you can always go directly to the source in advance of scheduling something else. Saying "I didn't know - you didn't tell me" is probably not going to work because it's usually not defensible.

Opportunities, planned or unexpected are a part of the game. As you build your careers you will be recognized, remembered or in any one of a dozen ways be given opportunities to do any number of things. You must set priorities and stick with them. There's an old adage that says "you gotta dance with the one what brung ya". It simply means that your first commitment is your first commitment, no matter how appealing additional ones might be. Ignoring this social fact will first cause great heartburn personally and will either damage or destroy your reputation professionally. We are in a very close-knit profession where there are many overlapping friendships and acquaintances. This can either work in your favor or against it. Ultimately, you're the one with control over it.

Desires, preferences, wants and wishes are all a part of life. It seems you have so little control over this part because of everything else that you can get smothered with and you have to push back. Having things you WANT to do is not only wise but it's healthy. YOU SHOULD WANT to do things as opposed to do them merely out of obligation. However, you always have to negotiate the slippery slope of desires, preferences, wants and wishes. These are, and should be, highly personal in nature. These make you a more well-rounded individual who is able to put everything in context. That's a good thing. But, there are going to be times, probably more than you like, that these will and must take a lower priority. When you've struck a good balance between them, you're well on your way to having a successful, joyful and fulfilling life and career. Keep in mind, you really do need both. It's called maturity.

Try to solve your own problem before instantly taking it to other parties to give you absolution. Too often, the perceived short and easy solution is to go to other parties and say "I have a conflict" and expect them to work it out for you. This is nothing more than avoidance. Take responsibility for yourself. After, and only after all means of resolution are exhausted, then you may need to seek assistance in resolving it. It's OK, people are willing to help.

Manipulating or circumventing the process is usually deadly. On one hand, don't ask permission from someone or notify someone who is not authorized to tell you yes. It's your responsibility to go directly to the person who will ultimately make the decision. Sometimes you feel it's more expedient to tell someone who you want to tell someone else and pass the information along. Clear and complete information is a necessity. To only provide partial information that manipulates other people is never a good idea. Usually, you'll eventually be discovered and when that happens, the consequences are nearly always unpleasant. Peers are not qualified to grant you permission.

"YES" is not a right or an entitlement and should not be your assumption. When you ask for permission to miss something, you should do so with hope of yes but the expectation of

no. If you have a compelling rationale that is presented in a logical and factual way, you stand a much better chance of success. The fact that you think it's a good idea or that your friends think it's a good idea is not compelling. It simply means you've rationalized it in your own mind and have stopped there. Don't resent the answer "NO". It's not given as punishment. It's not personal and no is usually the result of multiple factors, many of which you probably haven't considered.

Persistence is a very admirable quality – until it becomes a nuisance. If you've been told no and you persist in asking multiple times, in the same way, with the same information, you're only causing additional resistance to your original request. If there's additional information or clarification that needs to be made that's one thing; but, if you continue to ask expecting someone to change their mind because they're tired of hearing you talk about it you are pretty much guaranteed denial on any future requests as well, no matter how justifiable they may be. Repeating the same argument over and over is tedious and will only make both parties defensive.

If you ignore protocol, that is your choice and there will likely be consequences that you object to. You must realize that consequences for any action are a necessary part of interaction between people. If this is the path you choose, you must be prepared to accept those consequences without objection or complaint. Keep in mind that what you decided to do was entirely your decision. No one else made it for you. You cannot and should not expect absolution upon your return. Forgiveness is unlikely. It takes a lifetime to build trust and an instant to destroy it.

Notification does not constitute permission. Sending an email or text message or leaving a voice mail saying you won't be there and "it's OK isn't it" because you didn't actually make human contact isn't sufficient. Notification with the assumption of acceptance is naïve and presumptive at best. The statement of "I sent you an email..." or "I left you a note" does not grant you permission. You should not expect it to. As stated earlier, if an emergency arises and this is the most expedient way of communicating, that's one thing. Doing it as avoidance to the possibility or probably of no is something entirely different.

How to accept NO is not a science and is always difficult. You have to recognize that most people who say no would probably prefer to say YES, if the circumstances warranted it. If you understand how your request affects others, not just yourself, you are in a much better position to understand why no is sometimes the right answer and the only answer. This will allow you to accept "no" graciously and with understanding, rather than defensiveness and resentment. None of us exist in a vacuum and in many cases permissions really do affect more than you. All of us have experienced "no" at some point, often many times. You must learn how to deal with it successfully.

Final thoughts are many and varied. The big things have already been covered, but there are many moving parts to this issue. Too often conflicts result because of procrastination or because you already know the conflict exists and are unwilling to address it far enough in advance to resolve it. Too often blame gets misplaced because it's easier to think (or wish) the whole thing was created outside your sphere of existence and you are the victim. Admittedly, this occasionally happens, but rarely.

Sometimes there is no right answer. Yes, sometimes things are thrown at you at the last minute and you have to quickly adapt. We would like to think that sensitivity on

everyone's part is paramount and that most conflicts are avoidable. If you really, truly get caught in the middle of one of these situations, your best approach is to confer with both parties, try to get all the information, make your decision and go from there. You may even need to consider involving a third party; someone who can objectively look at all factors and assist with a solution. This person should ideally be at the same level as the parties you have a conflict with. If that's not possible or has other ramifications attached to it, it may not be possible – but try. It may get ugly, but dealing with adversity is a part of the personal, professional growth process and maturing. Know that in spite of what you may have heard or perceived, most faculty work hard to keep you out of these situations. We don't want to compromise you, because it compromises us.

Do good and good will come to you. It's an old cliché, but it's absolutely true. You may not think so at the time, but as you reflect backwards it becomes a mantra that will pay huge dividends. Usually logical thinking and planning will result in YES far more often than in NO.

This is all a part of the maturation process and it's not intended to be a mandate or a finger-wagging-shame-on-you epistle, but a guide to thinking about how to best grow in the profession. We truly are here to help in whatever way we can and not stand in your way and I hope you take this in the spirit in which it is intended. I truly DO wish you all the best!

Dfisher