



Mini But Mighty Skills for Well-Being

The Art of Saying No: Protecting
Boundaries to Preserve Physician
Well-being



Learning Objectives

- Identify how excessive responsibilities and the inability to decline requests contribute to burnout, stress, and reduced work-life balance
- Practice techniques for assertively and respectfully saying no to professional and personal requests that exceed capacity or misalign with priorities.



Meet Our Lead Faculty



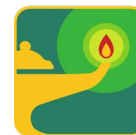
Elizabeth (Lisa) Cerceo, MD, FACP, FHM

Associate Professor of Medicine, Cooper Medical School
of Rowan University

Chair, Physician Engagement

Chair, Advocacy, ACP NJ

Associate Program Director, Internal Medicine



Meet Our Lead Faculty

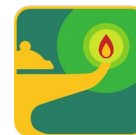


Ankita Sagar, MD, MPH, FACP

System VP, Clinical Standards &
Variation, CommonSpirit Health

Associate Clinical Professor, Creighton
University

Chair, Council of Early Career Physicians,
American College of Physicians

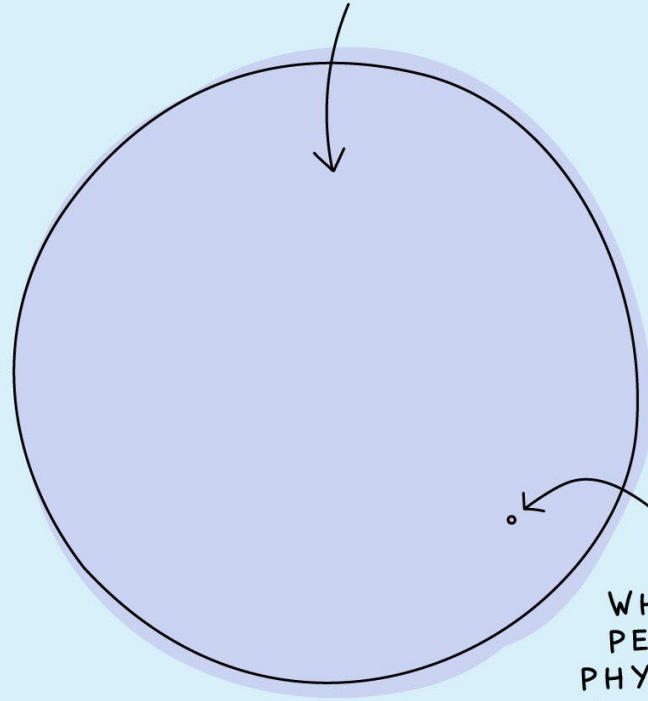


Factors of Burnout & Lack of Boundaries

- **Unpredictable Workloads:**
 - VUCA: Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, Ambiguity
 - Patient volume is dynamic, emergencies, on-call, and holiday schedules
 - First-responder mentality
- **Administrative Burdens:** documentation requirements and regulatory tasks
 - Physicians need **26.7 hours per day to provide the recommended preventive, chronic, and acute care** to a panel of 2,500 adult patients, including the related documentation and inbox work. (*Porter et al, 2022*)
- **Perfectionism:** a sense of responsibility to meet high expectations (*Marano, 2024*)
 - Cultural and Societal Expectations
 - Training that emphasizes accuracy and thoroughness, with little room for error
 - inherently driven and compassionate individuals, motivated by a desire to help others and make a significant impact
- **Workplace/Training Culture:** Organizations that value high output inadvertently encourage physicians to relax boundaries in exchange for monetary and non-monetary incentives
- **Fear of Repercussions:**
 - concerns about career progression, peer perception (*Marano, 2024*)
 - being labeled as uncooperative or “non-team player” (*Marano, 2024*)
 - fear of malpractice contribute (*Liang, 2022*)



WHAT I EXPECT
OF MYSELF



WHAT ONE
PERSON IS
PHYSICALLY
CAPABLE OF
DOING

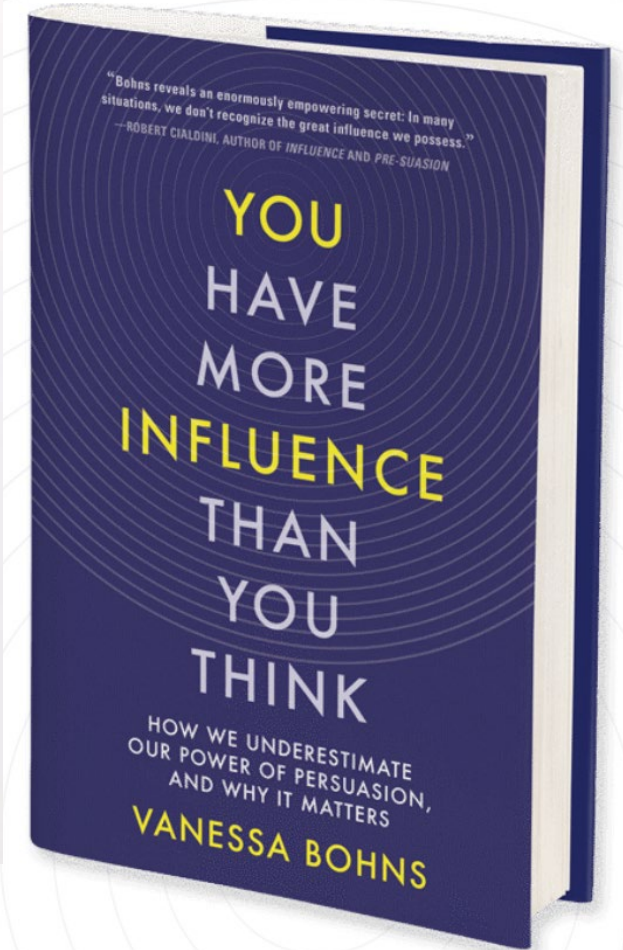
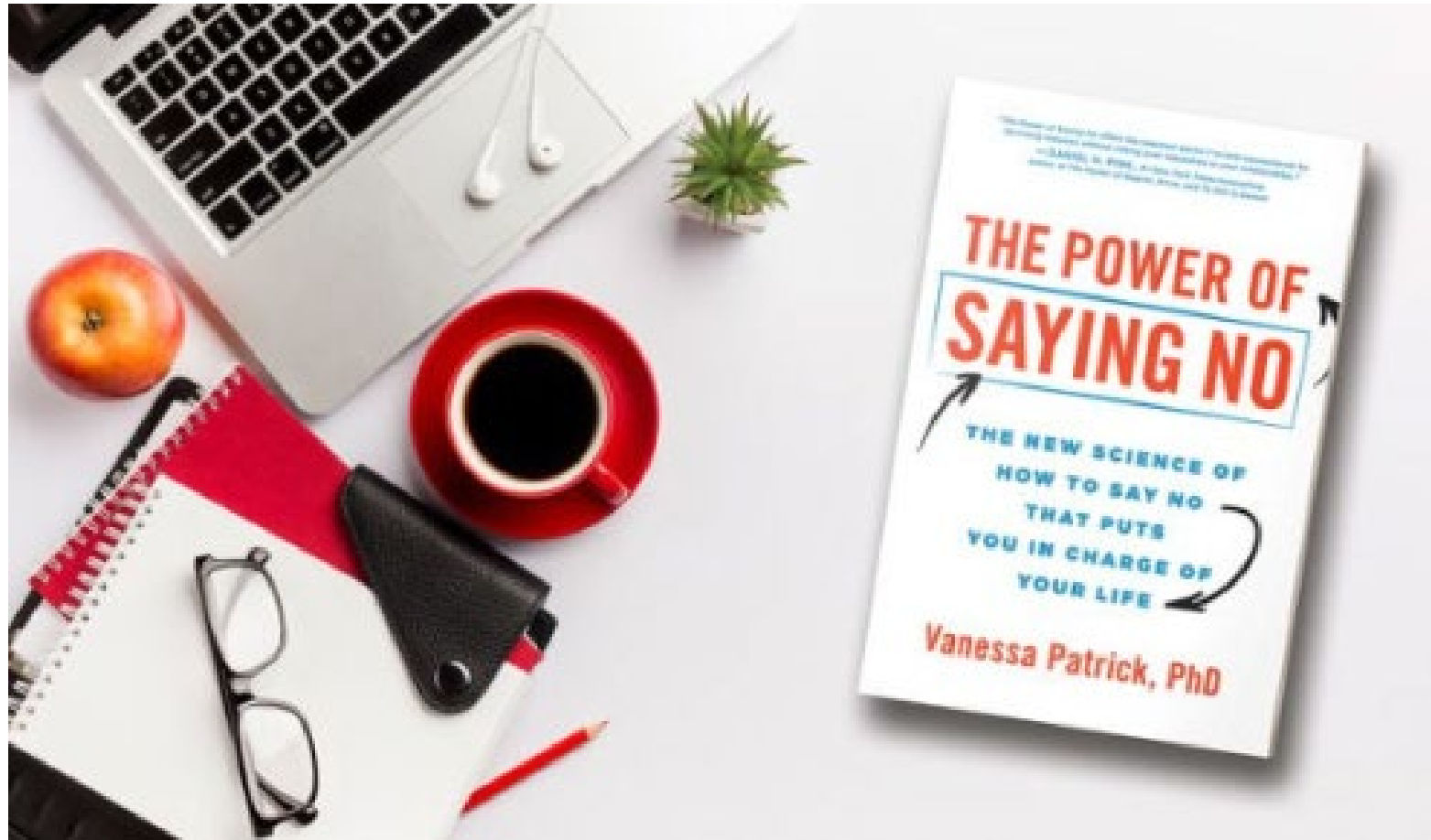
@LIZ AND MOLLIE



Why do we say “yes”?

- Concern about relationships
- Concern about reputation
 - Are we warm enough? Competent enough?
- Lack of skill with effective “no’s”
- Fear of missing out





What happens when we say yes?

- When we say yes, we think we will feel good about ourselves.
 - BUT we feel resentful, frustrated, angry.
- When we say no, we think we will feel guilty.
 - BUT we feel empowered, confident, in control.
- We can invest more in self-reflection and learn from what happens internally.



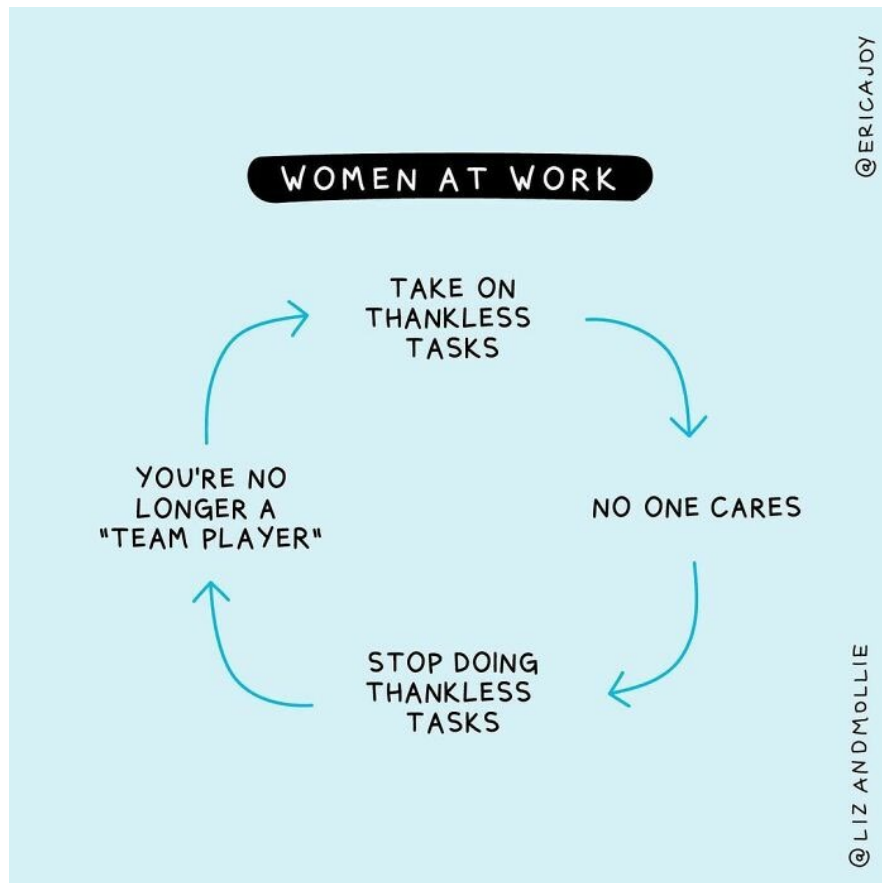
How do we usually say “no”?

- “I can’t do it but if you can’t find anyone else, I’ll help.”
- “It sounds like a great project. I would really like to help but I am working on X.”
- People pleasers may say several low stakes “yes” and pressure builds up.



Non-promotable tasks

- “Office housework”
- Common trap

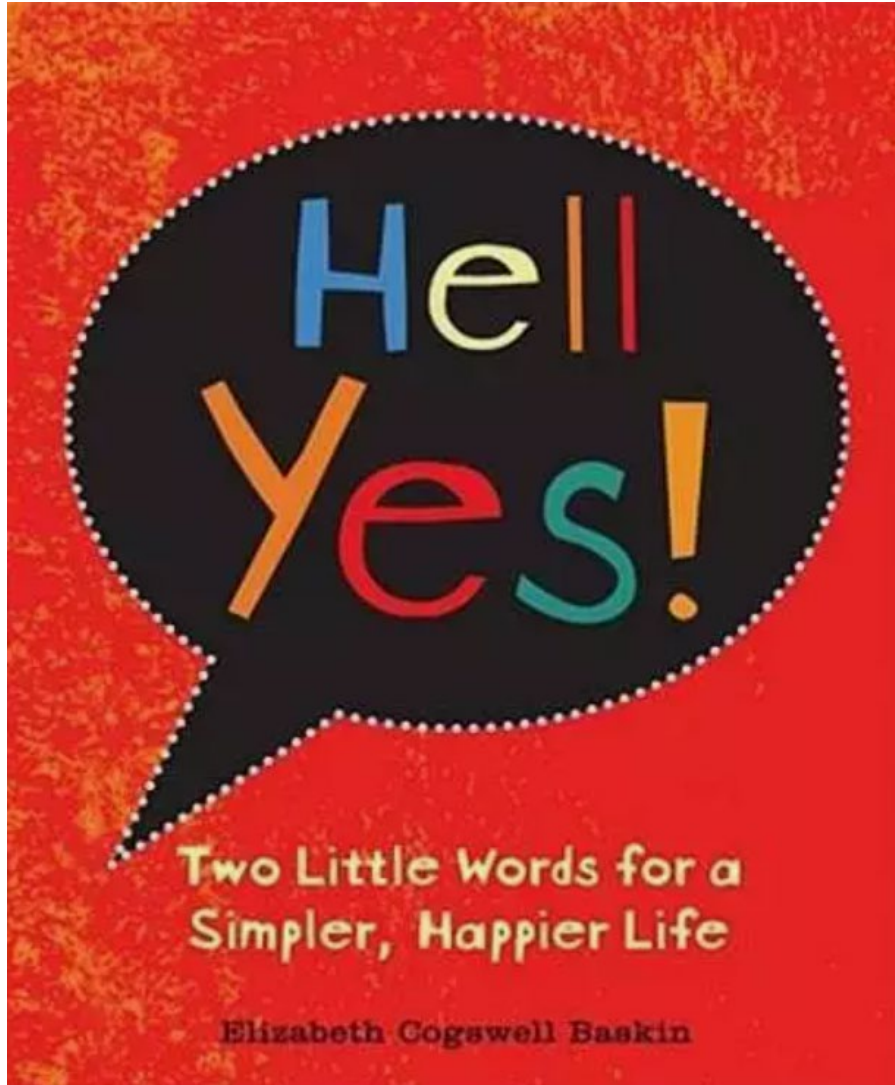


How should we say “no”?

- Strategic postponement
 - “I’m really busy right now but can I catch you later?”
 - “What is a good time to discuss this?”
 - “It seems like an important issue. I’d like to think about it.”
- Personal policies
 - Identify our priorities
 - Framework to say no more effectively
 - Ex. Out of office messages when on service
- Empowered refusal
 - Stems from our identity
 - Avoid giving excuses
 - “I don’t....” rather than “I can’t...”



Identify your priorities



- We need to identify those things that bring us joy and prioritize them.



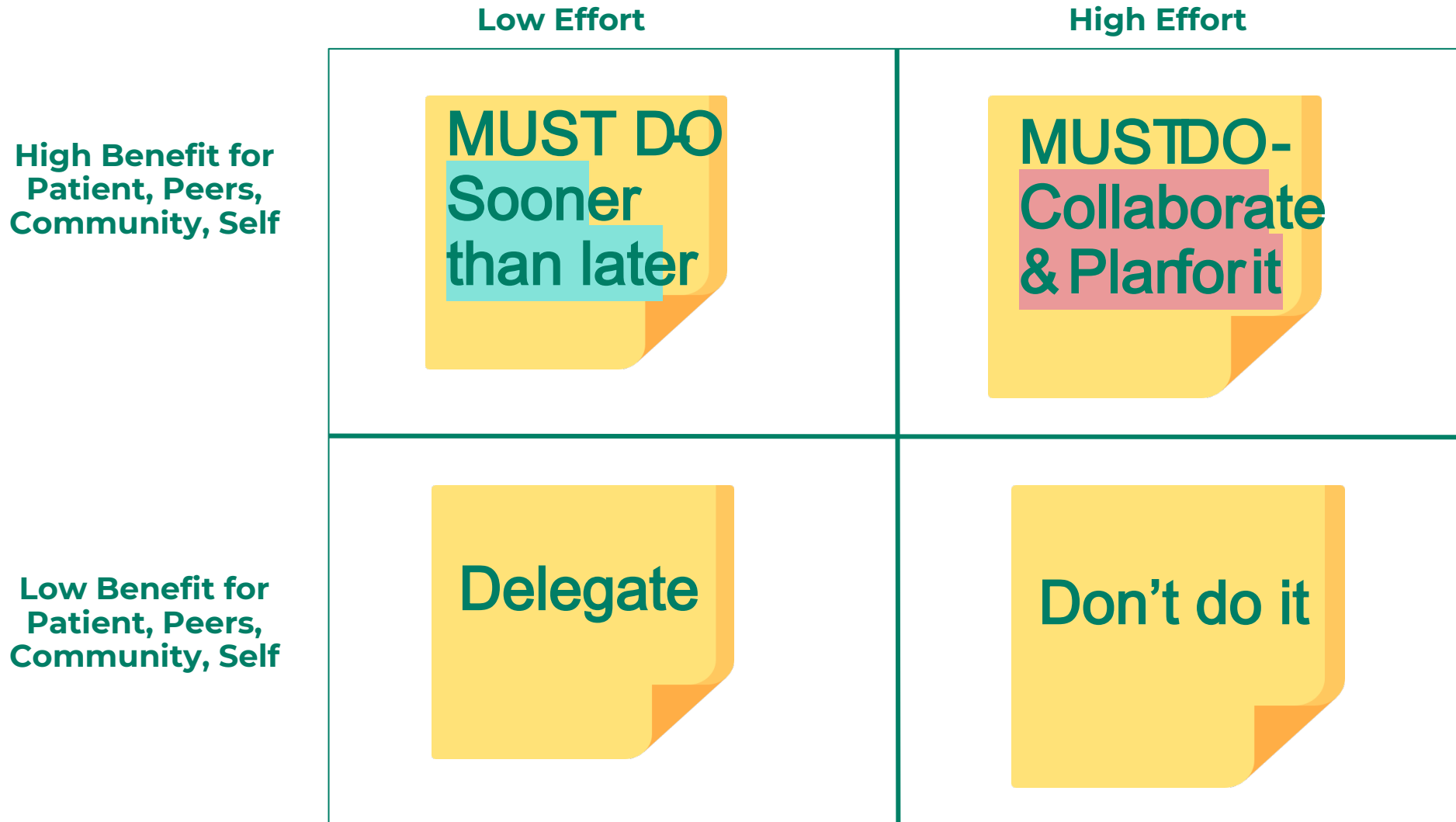
Negotiate



Delegate!



Decisions, Decisions



Adapted from [Eisenhower Matrix](#)



- **Estimate the time** - *generously* consider the work involved before getting to the exciting parts
- **Outsmart the pleasure principle** - tendency as humans to seek pleasure and avoid pain
 - We immediately say yes = a positive response from the requester = feels good!
- **Clarify the story** - what is the story you are telling yourself about that request?
 - Must do vs. can do vs. nice to do
 - Does it need an immediate response or can it wait till you mull it over?
 - Who made the ask? What is your relationship to this person? What's at stake in the relationship if you say yes or if you say no?
- **Align the Priorities** - if we prioritize everything, likely nothing will gain traction
 - how does this request align with your person or professional priorities?
- **Expectations** - Expectations are the guiding principles and ideologies to inform our decision-making, and they often lie just below the surface of our awareness.
 - Whose standards are influencing my decision to say yes or no? clarify and decouple your expectations from the expectations of the people in your life





Access additional well-being resources

www.acponline.org/minibutmighty

www.acponline.org/wellbeing

www.acponline.org/supporthub

