

THE STRAITS TIMES RECRUIT

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The ABC's of Work & Life

N is for No



Katie Mehnert says yes to saying no.

yourself – even if that means doing NOthing!

3. **“No” helps you open doors to others.** I’ve made my entire life about knowing people, their passions and what makes them truly unique. This allows me to “outsource” opportunities, as they are presented to me, to those better suited to say “yes”. Ultimately, knowing people enables me to get things done while helping them.

What “no” has done for others

One of my professional role models, Steve Jobs, said “no” more often than he said “yes”.

Jobs once said: “People think focus means saying yes to the thing you’ve got to focus on. But that’s not what it means at all. It means saying no to the hundred other good ideas that there are. You have to pick carefully. I’m actually as proud of the things we haven’t done as the things I have done. Innovation is saying no to 1,000 things.”

Shortly before Steve Jobs’ death in 2011, Apple passed Google as the most valuable brand in the world. You don’t get to the top without cutting the stuff out that doesn’t bring value.

But, I am NO saint.

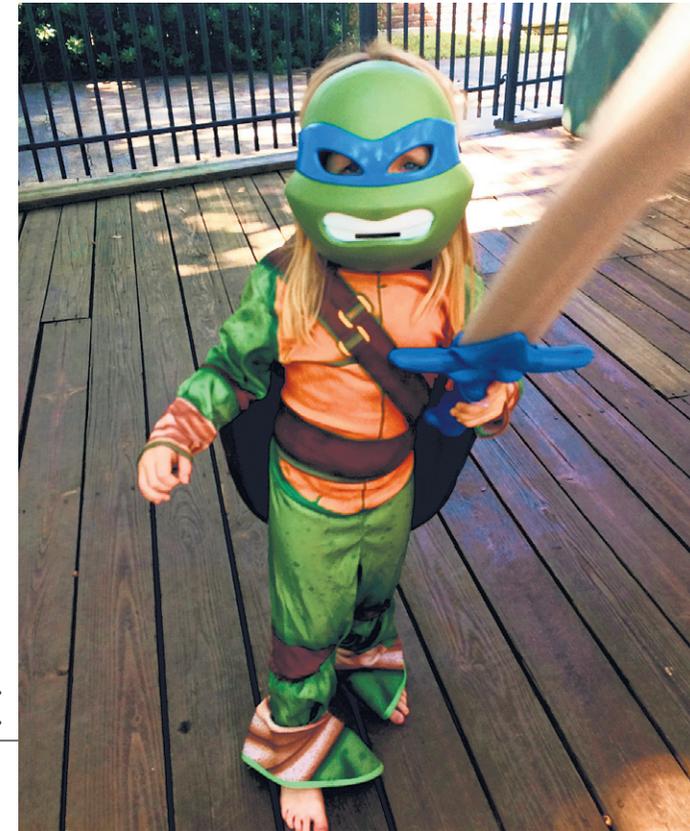
Just as I have little problem saying “no”, I am great at delegating and giving out a lot of work. Perhaps this is a problem you have too?

To rectify this situation, I regularly pick apart my employees’ “to-do” list. Hacking through and marking off things we aren’t going to do is empowering. If you have a boss who piles on the work, I highly recommend you ask to have your list of priorities *regularly prioritised*. Our world changes fast and priorities shift all the time, so it is not uncommon to ask for clarity and offer a kind “no”.

Yes or no: you just don’t know?

Trying to evaluate which to pick? Here are three questions I use to guide my thinking.

**Ninjas say no.
So be a ninja, like Ally.**



1. Is the opportunity aligned with my long-term needs and goals?
2. What will I gain from giving this time away?
3. What’s the worst thing that could happen if I did say “yes”?

Don’t forget that practice makes perfect. Make a conscious choice to employ “no” as a part of your work and life strategy. It takes a lot of courage, but **I know** you can do it.

So, I’m curious what you are **not going to do** this coming week. As you read The Straits Times Recruit this weekend, do yourself a favour, and pull out a piece of paper and write down everything you think you have to do.

Then, start cutting. **Be a ninja. Start saying “no”!**

I’d love to hear how the process works for you. Feel free to send me your not-to-do list or your best ninja selfie!

Katie Mehnert is a global talent development and change executive with 17 years of helping people and companies get curious, connect, share, grow and perform better. She has recently been appointed CEO of Pink Petro; www.pinkpetro.com, a platform to connect women and men in the energy industry and advance females in her industry. Prior to her latest venture, Katie was a Director with BP, joining after the Deepwater Horizon incident and worked in various leadership roles worldwide with Shell. She’s a dynamic speaker and author having been featured in LinkedIn, CEO.com, Business Insider, and Yahoo. As a work-in-progress marathon runner, wife and working mom, you can follow her musings on balancing it all on her blog at www.katiemehnert.com, or email her at katie@katiemehnert.com

When I ask Ally, my four-year-old, to do anything these days, her response is usually a confident “No, Mommy!” Her reasoning is simple. “Ninjas say no and I’m a ninja.”

Have you ever noticed how our children have no problem saying “no”, but adults have the opposite problem? We can’t stop ourselves from saying “yes” to everything.

It’s been a month since my holidays and I’m already getting requests to do more things than I should. Does this happen to you? Someone calls or emails and wants more of your time to do things you probably should not do? Or your boss decides “wouldn’t it be great if we did X or Y?”

In a world full of distractions and opportunities, saying “no” can be difficult. For some, it can be downright painful. We aren’t taught to say it. And no one I know likes hearing it. But it’s a necessary evil to drive us to our best.

As my roles have evolved as a wife, mother, leader, and now CEO, I’ve become very comfortable with the word – saying and hearing it. I actively seek to create a work environment where others also feel empowered to say “no!”

What “no” has done for me

1. **“No” gives you focus.** We all have to-do lists, but I also have **not-to-do** lists. Saying “yes” to everything dilutes you as a human being, spouse, parent, leader and friend. It’s a classic recipe for disaster. Saying it allows you to focus on making the most important contribution you can, and gives you the best opportunity to play to your strengths.

2. **“No” enables balance.** There’s nothing more freeing than having a calendar with open space. Saying “no” gives you time to do things for