

Avoid situations in which a "no" is more powerful than a "yes"



"That's great, Bob, but I was just going to ask if you wanted anything from the deli next door."

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In a 50/50 relationship—where each person has equal authority—a “no” is more powerful than a “yes.” For instance, in a marriage in which the 50/50 rule is in place, if one spouse says, “Let’s go out to eat on Friday,” and the other says, “No; I don’t want to,” the latter rules. “No” trumps “yes.”

This seems unfair to me.

This quirky adulteration of fairness is particularly potent and unsavory when one person in the 50/50 relationship tends to be negative and pessimistic, or controlling, or indecisive, or inordinately passive.

How can we avoid this situation?

- One obvious way is to avoid 50/50 relationships. Just one degree—a 51/49 relationship—can make a difference. (Just hope you possess that extra one percent.)
- Spread the power among three or more people, perhaps a 33/33/34 scenario, so that one person cannot control.

- Establish a measure of independence in decision making; don't frame an issue in terms that require consensus: "I'm going out to eat on Friday. Would you like to join me?"
- Carefully craft the initial statement such that you can say "no." You: "What would you like to do on Friday for dinner?" Other person's reply: "Stay at home." You: "No, I don't want to do that." In which case your "no" might prevail over the other person's preference.

I'm not advocating that we become manipulative and self-serving. I *am* suggesting that we avoid being manipulated and controlled and that we establish balance of power in mutual relationships.