

## The psychology of “going for no”

Interview by: Chris Schelzi, Appsumo

We're yes-battered. We've all been behaviorally conditioned (by the world) to immediately recognize -- and run from -- people seeking “yeses” from us.

### Chris Schelzi

You tell me about the problem with getting to yes or trying to go towards yes.

### Chris Voss

That's one of my pet peeves.

I mean, getting the yes out of people is the worst thing you can do. You know, and there's some nonsense that's been existing out there called “yes momentum,” or the momentum sell. Now, on the one hand, I'm glad that this has never gone away, nor will it ever go away, because everybody that we coach and train and when we get them out of it instantly, they're more competitive. I mean, it's probably the worst habit out there, and it's pervasive.

So, momentum selling. What is that? What is that nonsense? It's if you get somebody saying, yes, it's like they're hypnotized, and they've got to keep saying yes. You know, every single confirmation yes is a tie-down. And then ultimately, when you back them into the corner you want them in, they have to say yes in order to be consistent with the other yeses that they've already given.

I mean, this is so bad, you know... “Would you like to make more money?” “Would you like to have more free time?” “Would you like to live in a big house?” “Well, buy my sales program.” Everybody's been hammered by that. Everybody's yes-battered. I mean, maybe there was a point in time in your life when you were gullible and somebody said, “Would you like to make more money?” And you went, “Yeah,” and then they said, “Well, wow...would you like to have a really expensive car?”

And you went, “Yeah.” And then they said, “Would you like to have a beautiful girlfriend or beautiful, handsome boyfriend and live in a really big house?” You went “YEAAAH!” and then they went, “OK, buy my self-improvement program.”

And you said, “Where do I sign? How much? I don't care how much it is I...Wow. I gotta have it.”

I mean, maybe you can buy that sometime in the past, and then you bought that stupid program and you're like, “This is nonsense, this is crap. I can't do this. I mean, this is nonsense.”

And then maybe you did it one or two other times. Like, I think when I was about 20, I bought this stupid coupon book for \$25. It was supposed to be worth like \$25,000. And I couldn't figure out how to use any stupid coupons, like, you know, buy this at the Dollar Store, at midnight on Tuesday. I mean, it was stupid, but I got conned. So everybody's been conned by this at some point in time.

And everybody out there is yes-battered. The minute somebody tries to get you to say yes, and your first thought now, instead of going like, “Yeah,” you go like, “Oh, wait a minute... All right, where's the hook? Where's this going? There's a catch here. Every time it's happened to me in the past, there's a catch.” And the problem with people who are yes-battered, you know...I use the battered child analogy all the time...

You try to hug a child who has been battered. Let's say you're a good person and you want to give them a warm embrace and you know that in point of fact, it's been demonstrated that hugs are actually good for people. A hug, a warm embrace creates a neurological response that actually heals the body. So let's say you're in possession of this information, and you want to heal a battered child, you know... I'm here to tell you, you hug that battered child, and you raise your arms up, that battered child is going to flinch.

It does not matter what your intention was, and it does not matter if you're trying to apply something that you know is good for the other side. They've been battered in advance. They are going to pull away from you. And everybody on the planet has been yes-battered.

## Host

So, what do you do if this doesn't work?

## Chris Voss

Yeah, well, there you go. Right. You know, hopefully a lot of people watching this are going like, well, now what am I supposed to do?

## Host

Well, because it makes you think of, like, you know, a small town person going to a big city, and someone stops them on the corner. They're like, "Hey, do you have a minute to chat?" And the first time you do it, you're like, "Yeah, what's going on?" But then after a couple of those, it's just like you, you've become jaded. And then as soon as somebody has that jaded shield up, they're never going to respond to those yeses.

So instead, what are the options?

## Chris Voss

Yeah, exactly. Exactly.

And so as stupid as it sounds, change your question so the answer is no. I mean, we spent a fair amount of time coaching people out of yes-oriented questions into no-oriented questions. "Do you have a few minutes to chat?" becomes "Is now a bad time?" I mean, that is everybody that we've taught... When they call people on the phone, they say, "Is now a bad time to talk?" "No, no, no, no, it's not a bad time."

Or one of the things that I loved is I'm watching on LinkedIn people who are yes addicts. You know, if you're a yes addict. I'm going to say it even harder, you're a yes crackhead. A yes crackhead. And there is this post on LinkedIn that somebody put up:

I tried this, and I said, "Is now a bad time to talk?" And they said yes. And I thought, do you want to talk to somebody when they just told you it's a bad time? What are you smoking? But you want to do your sales pitch after they say, "Yeah, it's a bad time." Now, the context of that whole conversation is never, never give them a chance to say, "Yes, it's a bad time."

Well, you're not going to change the time frame. You're only going to become aware of what the time is for them.

So, if you are horrified at saying yes to them, what you're saying is now I'm going to give my sales pitch whether it's a good time for them or not. It's the worst time in the world to give a sales pitch. You've got to be kidding me. You are a crackhead for yes, if that's what your approach is to people. And that's why they're not going to pick up the phone next time you call.

## Host

The no-oriented questions are probably the thing that has changed my life the most in the past, I think. Two months since I read the book, and in every email or something like that that I'm sending out now, it's what I've been using to land some fantastic guests like yourself for this, where the end of the email pitch for the interview is like, "Would it be ridiculous to see if we could make this happen?"

And it's just crazy the results have completely flipped upside down, and it just feels like a little secret weapon that nobody knows about. And as soon as you turn it around..."Would it be impossible to do this?" "Would it be too much to ask if...?" "Would it be ridiculous if we did this?" And it's one of those things that feels awkward. But once you do it, and you see how powerful it is, it's mind blowing.

## Chris Voss

It is a secret weapon. We were doing training a couple of years ago with this, a large hospital holding corporation, and one of their executives was trying to get a head nurse in a hospital to agree to this program they wanted to implement and had been completely, you know, it was a female negotiator on both sides, completely... She'd been completely asking yes questions. So we do the block of instruction in the middle of the afternoon by changing yeses to no.

And she goes, "Really?" And she gets up out of the room and she goes and calls the head nurse on the phone and says, "Are you against implementing this program?" And the head nurse says, "No, I'm not against it. Let's see what we can do." She walks back into the room and says, "You guys are not going to believe what just happened." That's how instantaneous it is. I think it's awesome that you found that secret weapon and you're using it in your life.

## Host

Yeah, well, the first time I heard you say it was actually on a podcast with Kevin Rose, and you're telling the Robert Herjavec story. And I was at the gym listening to it, and I stepped out of the gym to send a follow-up email to something for a project that I was working on and just shot off that email. And then, you know, I hopped on a call with him the next day. And it was just something people can do today for the next email they send or the project that they're trying to work on and just throwing in one of those no-oriented questions.

And it feels awkward at first, but yeah. It's crazy powerful.

## Chris Voss

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Were you scared the first time you did it?

## Host

Oh yeah. Because you just feel like this is... It's like you're untraining, and so much of this is like you're untraining all of the things that you've been told, like you should ask yes questions and you should do it this way. And it sounds weird to say, "Would it be impossible to do this?"

It's like, "Well, no, of course it's not possible. Why are you asking?" But but yeah, it works. Yeah.

## Chris Voss



And then, and if there are issues on top of that, they'll tell you what the issues are. So it's cool. I mean, the implementation is great.

## Host

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