

Lead Yourself First™



A Self-Leadership Learning Experience

by Audrey Dendy-Hightower, PCC, CPC, ELI-MP, PMP

Before You Say Yes™

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Before You Say Yes™ Intro

Your guide to creating space between the ask and your answer.

Before You Say Yes™ is a practical self-leadership tool designed to help you slow down long enough to check your capacity, understand what's driving your response, and make a more intentional decision before you commit.

Because sometimes the problem isn't that you can't say no.

Sometimes you say yes before you've had a chance to check with yourself.

If you're used to being the dependable one, the helpful one, or the person who figures things out, yes can happen quickly. Someone asks. Your brain starts working on how to make it happen. And somewhere between agreeing to it and actually having to do it, you realize:

I really didn't want to say yes to this.

This tool gives you another option.

Pause.

The P.A.U.S.E.™ Method helps you:

P — Pause Before Answering

A — Assess Your Capacity

U — Understand What's Driving Your Yes

S — See the Trade-Off

E — Express Your Decision

“I created Before You Say Yes™ for people who are used to being the ones others depend on. When being helpful, capable and dependable becomes part of how you move through the world, it can be easy to consider what everyone else needs before checking in with yourself. My hope is that this tool gives you that moment back—the space to pause, check your capacity and make a decision that includes you too.”

Let's start with a simple question:

What happens between the ask and your yes?

Before We Start

How many times have you said yes and regretted it before the conversation was even over?

You agreed to help. Take on the extra assignment. Attend the thing. Make the call. Handle the problem. Volunteer. Fix it.

And somewhere between “Sure, I can do that” and actually having to do it, you thought:

Why did I say yes to this?

Here's something I want you to consider. Maybe you don't have a problem saying no.

Maybe you need a little more space before you say yes.

Because sometimes yes happens fast.

Someone asks. You know you *can* do it. You know they need you. And before you've checked your calendar, your energy or whether you even want to do it, you've already agreed.

Then you figure out how to make it work.

Sound familiar?

This tool is about creating a pause between the ask and your answer.

Not so you can say no to everything.

Not so you can become unavailable.

And certainly not so every request requires a committee meeting with yourself.

The pause simply gives you enough room to make an intentional decision.

Because you should be part of the decision too.

The Automatic Yes

For some of us, yes is almost a reflex.

Someone asks for something and our brain immediately starts calculating.

Can I move this?

Maybe I can do it after work.

I could probably squeeze it in.

It shouldn't take that long.

Here's what I want you to notice.

You didn't ask whether you wanted to do it. You just started figuring out how to do it.

There's a difference.

When you're accustomed to being dependable, helpful or the person who handles things, this can happen so quickly that you don't even recognize it as a decision.

You go straight into logistics. Try This:

Think about the last three things you agreed to that you later wished you hadn't.

What did you agree to?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Now, go back to each one.

Did you genuinely want to say yes?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I'm not sure
- ☐ I never really asked myself

Pay attention if you checked that last box.

That's where we're starting.

Why the Pause Matters

Your brain likes familiar patterns.

That's useful. You don't want to spend ten minutes every morning trying to remember how to brush your teeth.

The brain uses past experience, habits and mental shortcuts to help us move through familiar situations more efficiently.

And that means your response to a request can become familiar too.

If you've spent years being the dependable one, the helpful one, the problem-solver or the person who figures it out, "I'll handle it" can start showing up before you've considered whether you actually should or really could.

Add stress, fatigue and a full day of decisions, and slowing down long enough to thoughtfully consider one more thing can become harder.

So we're going to interrupt the pattern. Not with a 20-minute meditation.

With a pause.

Sometimes twenty seconds is enough to ask yourself: Do I actually want to say yes to this?

That question is simple. The answer may be interesting.

The P.A.U.S.E.™ Method

Before your next automatic yes, P.A.U.S.E.

P — Pause Before Answering

A — Assess Your Capacity

U — Understand What's Driving Your Yes

S — See the Trade-Off

E — Express Your Decision

You don't have to memorize all of this right now.

We're going to walk through it.

And more importantly, you're going to use it.

P — Pause Before Answering

Here's where we start.

You do not have to answer immediately.

A request doesn't become an emergency just because somebody asked with urgency.

Give yourself permission to create a little space.

You can say:

“Let me check a few things and get back to you.”

“Let me look at my schedule first.”

“I need to think about that before I commit.”

That's enough.

You don't need a dissertation.

You don't need to convince the other person that you have a legitimate reason to think.

And you don't need seven supporting exhibits explaining why you haven't answered yet.

You are checking with yourself. That's reason enough.

Your Pause Phrase

Choose a phrase you can use when you need time before answering.

My go-to phrase:

The goal is to have the words ready before you need them.

A — Assess Your Capacity

This is where a lot of us get ourselves in trouble.

We look at the calendar and ask: Do I have time?

I want you to ask a different question: **Do I have capacity?**

Time and capacity aren't the same thing.

You can have two free hours and absolutely no bandwidth for another emotionally demanding conversation.

You can have room on your calendar and no energy left to lead another project.

You can technically fit something in and still pay for it later.

Think about your phone battery.

If your battery is sitting at 18%, you don't behave as though you have 100% available just because the phone is still on. You start making choices.

Your capacity deserves the same consideration.

Your Capacity Check

Rate each area from 1–5 based on where you are right now.

TIME

- 1 — I don't have it.
- 2 — I'd have to rearrange quite a bit.
- 3 — I could make it work.
- 4 — I have room.
- 5 — Plenty of room.

My score: _____

ENERGY

- 1 — I'm running on fumes.
- 2 — I'm already stretched.
- 3 — I can manage it.
- 4 — I have capacity.
- 5 — I have plenty of energy available.

My score: _____

MENTAL BANDWIDTH

- 1 — My brain has left the building.
- 2 — I'm carrying too much already.
- 3 — Manageable.
- 4 — I have room to think.
- 5 — I'm clear and available.

My score: _____

EMOTIONAL CAPACITY

1 — I have very little emotional capacity right now.

2 — This feels heavy.

3 — I can manage it.

4 — I'm emotionally available.

5 — I have emotional capacity for this.

My score: _____

The number doesn't make the decision for you. It's information.

Sometimes seeing the number makes visible what we've been trying very hard not to notice.

What Did You Notice? (Take a look at your 4 ratings)

Where do you have the most capacity right now?

Where is your capacity more limited?

Did anything surprise you?

Note: There is no good capacity score.

This is a snapshot of where you are right now. Your capacity may look different tomorrow, next week, or even later today.

The point is to know what you have available before you decide how you want to use it.

Check the battery first. Then decide what deserves the charge.

U — Understand What's Driving Your Yes

Now we're going to get curious. No judgment. Just information.

I Want to Say Yes Because...

Check everything that applies.

☐ I genuinely want to do it.

- ☐ It matters to me.
- ☐ It aligns with something I value.
- ☐ It supports a priority I've already chosen.
- ☐ I care about this person.
- ☐ I'm afraid they'll be disappointed.
- ☐ I don't want them to be upset with me.
- ☐ I don't want to look selfish or difficult.
- ☐ I'm worried about what they'll think of me.
- ☐ I feel responsible for fixing it.
- ☐ They need me.
- ☐ I'm used to being the person who handles things.
- ☐ It would be easier to do it myself.
- ☐ I don't trust someone else to do it correctly.
- ☐ I don't want to explain why I'm saying no.
- ☐ I feel guilty.
- ☐ I don't know. I just automatically said yes.
- ☐ Other: _____

Now look at what you checked.

There's no score.

We're looking for what's underneath the yes.

Because: **I want to** and **I don't want them to be disappointed** can both produce the exact same answer. **Yes.**

But they're not coming from the same place.

Get Curious

Which answer surprised you?

What shows up most often when you say yes and later regret it?

What are you usually trying to avoid by saying yes?

S — See the Trade-Off

Every yes costs something. Sometimes the cost is absolutely worth it.

The point isn't to avoid the cost. The point is to see it before you agree to pay it.

Ask yourself:

If I Say Yes to This, What Am I Saying No To?

Maybe it's Rest, Time with your family, Finishing your own work, Exercise, Quiet, Money, Another commitment, Your weekend, Your peace, Or maybe you look at the trade-off and think:

I'm good with that. Great!

Then you've made an intentional choice.

The Trade-Off

If I say yes to:

I will have less time, energy or attention for:

I may need to move, postpone or cancel:

The person most likely to absorb the cost of this yes is:

Am I comfortable with that trade?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ I'm not sure yet

If you're not sure, don't rush past it. Go back to the pause.

E — Express Your Decision

Here's something else I want you to remember.

You have more than two choices.

It isn't: YES or NO, AND NOW EVERYONE IS MAD AT ME.

You have options.

- **YES.** You're comfortable using some of your available capacity here. You want to do it. The trade-off makes sense. Say yes and enjoy the fact that you chose it.
- **NO.** You don't have the capacity, don't want to do it, or the trade-off doesn't work for you. You can say no gracefully. Try:
 - "I'm not able to take that on." OR
 - "Thanks for thinking of me. I'm going to pass this time."

Notice what's missing. The 14-paragraph explanation.

- **NOT NOW.** Sometimes the request isn't the problem. The timing is. For this Try:
 - "I can't do that this week, but I could revisit it next month."

That's still a boundary.

- **YES, WITH CONDITIONS.** This one gets overlooked. Maybe you can help, but not in the way originally requested.
 - "I can't take the whole project, but I can review the proposal."
 - "I can't stay for the entire event, but I can come for the first hour."
 - "I can help, but I need it by Thursday."

A qualified yes is still a yes. Sometimes it's the yes that actually works.

Put P.A.U.S.E.™ Into Practice

Now let's put everything together.

THE REQUEST: What am I being asked to do?

P — PAUSE

Do I need more time before answering?

☐ Yes

☐ No

If yes, what will I say?

A — ASSESS

What did my Capacity Check tell me about what I have available right now:

U — UNDERSTAND

What's really driving my desire to say yes?

S — SEE

If I say yes, what's the biggest trade-off?

E — EXPRESS

My decision:

☐ YES

☐ NO

☐ NOT NOW

☐ YES, WITH CONDITIONS

What I will say:

When Resentment Shows Up

Resentment gets a bad reputation.

We tend to treat it as something we're supposed to get rid of.

I want you to get curious about it instead. Because sometimes resentment is information.

It may be pointing to something you agreed to that you didn't really want to agree to.

It may be showing you where you've continued giving after your capacity was gone.

Or maybe you expected someone to recognize a limit you never actually communicated.

So the next time you hear yourself thinking: "Why am I always the one who has to...?"

Pay attention. That's interesting.

Ask yourself:

- What am I doing that I no longer want to do this way?
- What expectation have I agreed to or allowed to continue?
- What conversation am I avoiding?
- Where might a boundary be missing?

You don't have to immediately blame yourself and you don't have to immediately blame them.

Get curious first. Curiosity gives you somewhere to go.

Make the Next Decision Easier

Here's where a little behavioral science can help.

Knowing what you want to do doesn't always mean you'll remember to do it when you're standing in the moment.

One well-studied strategy is called an **implementation intention**.

The idea is pretty simple: If this happens, then I'll do this.

You're deciding ahead of time how you want to respond when a particular situation occurs.

We're going to use that idea to make your pause easier.

My P.A.U.S.E.™ Plan

Complete this sentence:

If someone asks me to take on something that requires my time, energy or attention, before I answer I will:

For example:

If someone asks me to make a commitment, I'll tell them I need to check my schedule and get back to them before I answer.

You're no longer trying to invent a boundary with someone staring at you waiting for an answer.

You've already decided what you'll do.

The 60-Second P.A.U.S.E.™

You do not need to pull out an entire workbook every time somebody asks you to bring potato salad.

This is the version you take with you.

BEFORE YOU SAY YES, ASK:

1. Do I have the **capacity**? Not just time. Capacity.
2. What's driving my yes? Is it Want? Guilt? Obligation? Fear? Habit?
3. What's the trade-off? What gets less of me if this gets more?
4. What do I actually **want** to say? YES, NO. NOT NOW, YES, WITH CONDITIONS
5. Do I need to answer right now? Maybe not.

P.A.U.S.E.

You are allowed to check with yourself before you commit yourself.

One Last Thing

The goal isn't to say no more often. The goal is to become more intentional about your yes.

There will be times when you look at your capacity, see that you're already stretched, understand the trade-off and choose yes anyway.

That's okay. It's your decision and you made it consciously.

That's very different from waking up Saturday morning irritated because apparently Tuesday-you volunteered Saturday-you for something without consulting her.

We're trying to keep Tuesday-you and Saturday-you on speaking terms.

That's self-leadership.

Before you lead the project.

Before you manage the family.

Before you take care of everyone else.

Before you solve the problem.

Lead Yourself First.

Sometimes that starts with one small word.

Pause.

About Audrey

Audrey Dendy-Hightower, PCC, CPC, ELI-MP, PMP, is an executive coach, leadership strategist and speaker with more than 30 years of experience in leadership, program management, organizational change and coaching.

Her work centers on a simple principle:

Lead Yourself First.

Audrey works with people who are accustomed to being the ones others depend on. Her work helps them get curious about their patterns, strengthen their boundaries, understand their capacity and make more intentional choices about how they lead, work and live.

Continue the work

Explore additional Lead Yourself First™ tools, resources and coaching with Audrey Dendy-Hightower.