

HUFFPOST WOMEN

How to Say 'No' While Laughing Along the Way

When I was coming up through the ranks in the advertising industry, I didn't lead what anyone would call a "balanced" life. I woke up, went to work, worked late, went home, went to bed and then went back for more on the weekends.

Even when I wasn't at work, I was still thinking about work. When I was at the pool, I was reading *Made To Stick* or *Good To Great* and when I was drinking wine with my girlfriends, I was grilling them about what was in their pantry and why they bought it. They thought it was charming ("Oh here she goes again!"), and I thought it was helpful. Everybody was a winner.

I liked my life back then. I took pride in being a hard worker and my over-punched time card helped me advance quickly through the ranks of responsibility.

However, I was stopped in my tracks one day when a client asked me "what I did for fun" outside the office. It was the ONLY question he had all day that I couldn't answer.

Since "sleep" seemed like a remarkably lame response, I feigned an awkward giggle and quickly changed the subject. It bothered me that I couldn't answer his question. But it didn't bother me for long. I went back to work and forgot about it. Imagine that.

...Until I conceived, grew, and birthed a life outside of work. My daughter, Layla.

It was official. Once I had the first sign of a life outside of work, I wanted to protect it. But I didn't know how. I didn't know how to say NO. Truth be told, I'd never really done it.

Want me to work all weekend? Yep.

Want me to jump on a plane and fly to NYC tomorrow at 6 a.m.? Sure.

Want me to work 19 hour days, three days in a row? You betcha.

In all honesty... I'd had a million different versions of YES, but I'd never uttered the word NO.

When I came back from maternity leave with a new purpose (and new fears), I asked my business partner Brad Armstrong for advice. How could I learn to say no while helping to lead the biggest account in the agency's history?

His advice was provocative and profound. And it changed my life.

"When it comes to saying no, just think of your job like a teenage boy trying to make out with you. This job is going to take everything you'll give it and STILL want more. And it's up to YOU to draw boundaries regarding what you ARE, and ARE NOT willing to do. And it's imperative to determine and declare your boundaries (not working weekends, protecting dinner time at home, etc.) BEFORE the heat of the moment. Because if you wait until the heat of the moment, they'll start begging ("but Katherine we neeeeeeeed you in this meeting that's in LA tomorrow) and you'll start caving."

Holy macaroni.

In the 27 seconds it took for him to share his advice, I could feel my life changing. It was the perfect analogy. Maybe because I made out with too many boys in high school, or maybe because it was so profoundly simple. Who cares. It worked.

And since most of the people I worked with at the time were men, I had fun with it. FOR YEARS.

When they asked me to do something that would jeopardize the boundaries I'd set, I'd simply say (in my mind), *Nope. I am not making out with you right now.* Then I'd giggle and tell them No.

It worked.

Like magic.

Every time.

It changed my life in so many ways. It gave me a guilt-free way to say no, it protected my NEW and very important life outside of work, and it made me laugh along the way.

Now, that's some great advice.

Who knew being a "prude" could be so much fun?