

Directions: In this section, you are going to read a passage with ten statements attached to it. Each statement contains information given in one of the paragraphs. Identify the paragraph from which the information is derived. You may choose a paragraph more than once. Each paragraph is marked with a letter. Answer the questions by marking the corresponding letter on **Answer Sheet 2**.

Learning to say no

- A) Not doing something will always be faster than doing it. This philosophy applies in many areas of life. For example, there is no meeting that goes faster than not having a meeting at all. This is not to say you should never attend another meeting, but the truth is that we say "yes" to too many things we don't actually want to do.
- B) How often do people ask you to do something and you just reply, "Sure." Three days later, you're overwhelmed by how much is on your to-do list. We become frustrated by our obligations even though we were the ones who said "yes" to them in the first place. Even worse, people will occasionally fight to do things that waste time. You don't have to do something just because it exists. It's worth asking if things are necessary. Many of them are not, and a simple "no" will be more productive than whatever work the most efficient person can cope with. But if the benefits of saying "no" are so obvious, then why do we say "yes" so often?
- C) We say "yes" to many requests not because we want to do them, but because we don't want to be seen as rude or unhelpful. Often, we have to consider saying "no" to someone we will interact with again in the future—our co-worker, our spouse, our family and friends. Saying "no" to our superiors at work can be particularly difficult. In these situations, I like the approach recommended in *Essentialism* by Greg McKeown. He writes, "Remind your superiors what you would be neglecting if you said 'yes' and force them to deal with the trade-off. For example, if your manager comes to you and asks you to do X, you can respond with 'Yes, I'm happy to make this the priority. Which of these other projects should I deprioritize to pay attention to this new project?'"
- D) Collaborating with others is an important element of life. The thought of straining the relationship outweighs the commitment of our time and energy. For this reason, it can be helpful to be gracious in your response. Do whatever favors you can, and be warm-hearted and direct when you have to say no. But even after we have accounted for these social considerations, many of us still seem to do a poor job of managing the trade-off between yes and no. We find ourselves over-committed to things that don't meaningfully improve or support those around us, and certainly don't improve our own lives.
- E) Perhaps one issue is how we think about the meaning of yes and no. The words "yes" and "no" get so often used in comparison with each other that it feels like they carry equal weight in conversation. In reality, they're not just opposite in meaning, but of entirely different magnitudes in commitment. When you say "no", you're only saying "no" to one option. When you say "yes", you're saying "no" to every other option. I like how economist Tim Harford put it, "Every time we say 'yes' to a request, we're also saying 'no' to anything else we might accomplish with the time?" Once you're committed to something, you've already decided how that future block of time will be spent. In other words, saying "no" saves you time in the future. Saying "yes" costs you time in the future. "No" is a form of time credit. You retain the ability to spend your future

time however you want. "Yes" is a form of time debt. You have to pay back your commitment at some point.

- F) "No" is a decision. "Yes" is a responsibility. Saying "no" is sometimes seen as a luxury that only those in power can afford. And it's true: turning down opportunities is easier when you can fall back on the safety net provided by power, money, and authority. But it's also true that saying "no" is not merely a privilege reserved for the successful. It's also a strategy that can help you become successful. Saying "no" is an important skill to develop at any stage of your career because it retains the most important asset in life: your time. As investor Pedro Sorrentino put it, "If you don't guard your time, people will steal it from you." You need to say "no" to whatever isn't leading you toward your goals.
- G) Nobody embodied this idea better than Steve Jobs, who 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." Jobs had another great quote about saying "no": "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."
- H) Over time, as you continue to improve and succeed, your strategy needs to change. The opportunity cost of your time increases as you become more successful. At first, you just eliminate the obvious distractions and explore the rest. As your skills improve and you learn to separate what works from what doesn't, you have to continually increase your threshold for saying "yes". You still need to say "no" to distractions, but you also need to learn to say "no" to opportunities that were previously good uses of time, so you can make space for better uses of time. It's a good problem to have, but it can be a tough skill to master.
- I) What is true about health is also true about productivity: an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. More effort is wasted doing things that don't matter than is wasted doing things inefficiently. And if that is the case, elimination is a more useful skill than optimization. I'm reminded of the famous Peter Drucker quote, "There is nothing so useless as doing efficiently that which should not be done at all."
36. People often grant a request just because they want to appear polite and helpful.
37. It's no easy job learning to say "no" to opportunities that were once considered worth grasping.
38. When you decline a request, you are saving your future time.
39. People sometimes struggle to do things that are simply a waste of time.
40. Doing efficiently what is not worth doing is the most useless effort.
41. It is especially difficult for people to decline to do what their superiors ask them to do.
42. People agree to do too many things they are in fact unwilling to do.
43. According to one famous entrepreneur, innovation means refusal to do an enormous number of things.
44. It is an essential aspect of life to cooperate with other people.
45. Refusing a request is sometimes seen as a privilege not enjoyed by ordinary people.