

The English way of saying 'No'

We are shortly going to be launching our new workshop on 'How to be assertive in English'. As part of the development process, I reflected on own my skills at saying 'No'. Like many English people there is some sort of 'cultural baggage', which makes me instinctively look to avoid using the word. Having worked in Luxembourg for many years - I have learnt this aversion to the 'No' word is not shared in many other cultures. Through my wife, I have also got to know the German culture really well and they really have no problem with the word 'No'!

Please find some alternative expressions below that I and we (English people) might use instead of No! As my wife would say you have to listen closely for the subtext! Please also note I don't recommend these expressions as they can get in the way of simple and powerful communication.

Alternative English ways of saying 'No'.

- **Maybe, I am not sure right now.** This often means No!
- **That could be interesting.** I am really not sure about that idea.
- **I can't right now, but maybe later.** This means perhaps in the future or it can simply mean no!
- **Unfortunately, I've had a few things come up.** This means that you are busy and cannot do it right now.
- **I will try to come.** This means you might well not come.
- **Can I have a think about that?** I don't want to commit to this right now.
- **I'm really up against it – can I get back to you later.** This means you are too busy right now.

- **I can't do that, but I'm happy to help you with something else later.** This is a super polite way of saying you can't do that particular task.
 - **Sorry but that isn't my strong suit.** This is another way of saying you are not skilled at that/don't want to do that.
 - **I'm sure you will do fine on your own.** This is a polite way of telling someone to do it themselves.
 - **I'm afraid I have a commitment at that time.** This is a polite way of saying you are unavailable.
 - **That is not really my cup of tea.** This is not something that interests you
 - **I'm sorry, but I have an emergency to attend to.** This highlights you have something urgent you must do – or you would at least like to give that impression.
 - **I'm sorry I can't.** This means it's absolutely impossible for you.
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