

As hard as I’ve tried, I’ve never been able to master Obi-Wan Kenobi’s Jedi mind trick to get someone to say what you want them to say. But there are things we can do to stack the odds in our favor, hopefully avoiding a “no” response to our ideas.



The Prerequisite

Before sharing some specific tips, there is one foundational element that has to be true: What you’re asking for has to be in the best interest of your organization, not just your own best interest. You’re on your own to figure out how to satisfy your self-centered desires. The leaders I work with recognize that the best way for them to get ahead is to tie their [personal success](#) to the success of those around them, individually and corporately. So that’s the context for this article.

Making “No” Difficult

Although emotions, personalities, relationships, and politics make things murky sometimes, getting agreement generally comes down to making the benefits of what you’re asking for outweigh the risks (real or perceived). Try these tips to make “no” a less desirable option:

- **Tie to mission and values.** Whether they’ve ever written it down or not, your organization has a mission. It has values, too. Your boss also has a personal mission and values, even if he’s never articulated them. But if you’ve discovered them, identify how your request advances the organization’s mission and aligns with their values. If it also advances your boss’s mission and aligns with his values, your case is even stronger.
- **Focus on outcomes.** Present the compelling benefits of your request. This may sound counterintuitive, but present the risks as well. Show that you’ve thought it through thoroughly and still believe the benefits outweigh the risks. Be prepared to back up your claims with data as much as possible.
- **Present options.** Demonstrate that you understand the risks *and benefits* of denying your request. Compare that to the risks and benefits of your plan. If you can’t get traction with that, be prepared to compare other alternatives that change the benefit/risk ratio in different ways. You may not win the game in one pass, but you still might be able to make forward progress so you don’t have to settle for nothing. Make sure your boss knows the risks he’s accepting and benefits he may miss with each option.
- **Stay positive.** Even if you lose this round, you increase your likelihood of future success by losing gracefully and being a team player who’s on board with leadership decisions – *whether you agree with them or not*. Make it easy for them to want to give you a yes! Nobody likes a sore loser.

How You Say It Matters

Recognize that *how* you present your case carries at least as much weight as the content of your case itself. And knowing how to present your case well requires you to have developed the emotional intelligence to be able to read your audience and recognize when to press and when to back off.