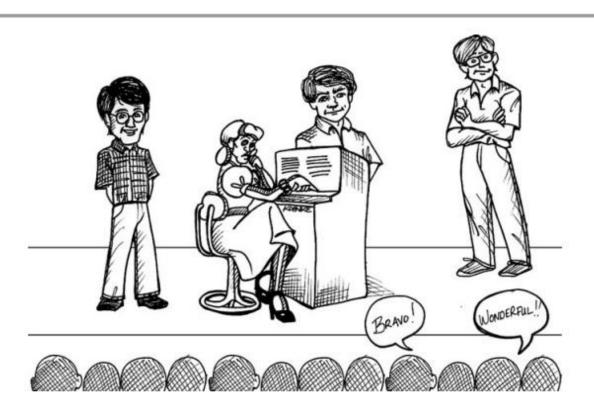# Chapter 3: Saying Yes

February 6, 2024

The Language of Commitment

- Three parts to making a commitment
  - You *say* you'll do it
  - You *mean* it
  - You *actually do* it
- Very few people who when they say something they mean it and then actually get it done
- Sometimes we'd like to believe someone really means what they say when they really don't
- We can use some language-related tricks to try and figure out if people really mean what they say

Recognizing Lack of Commitment

- Here are some examples of words and phrases to look for that are telltale signs of non-commitment:
  - **Need\should**. "We need to get this done." "I need to lose weight." "Someone should make that happen."
  - **Hope\wish**. "I hope to get this done by tomorrow." "I hope we can meet again someday." "I wish I had time for that." "I wish this computer was faster."
  - **Let's.** (not followed by "I . . .") "Let's meet sometime." "Let's finish this thing."
- You'll find we tend to be very busy not taking responsibility for things
  - Not okay when you or someone else relies on those promises as part of the job.

Examples…

- You ask the IT guy why the network is so slow, and he says "Yeah. We really need to get some new routers." And you know nothing will ever happen in that category.

- You ask a team member to run some manual tests before checking in the source code, and he replies, "Sure. I hope to get to it by the end of the day." And somehow you feel that you'll need to ask tomorrow if any testing really took place before check-in.

- Your boss wanders into the room and mumbles, "we have to move faster." And you know he really means YOU must move faster. He's not going to do anything about it.

What does Commitment Sound Like?

- Victims of a situation instead of in control of it
  - Out of "my" hands or they don't take personal responsibility
- I will . . . by . . . (example: I will finish this by Tuesday.)
  - You're stating a fact about something YOU will do with a clear end time
  - You're not talking about anyone else but yourself.
  - You're talking about an action that you will take. You won't "possibly" take it, or "might get to it"; you will achieve it
- Verbal commitment, you either get it done or you don't.

It wouldn't work because I rely on person X to get this done

- You can only commit to things that you have full control of
- You can't commit to finishing a module that depends on another team member
- Can commit to specific actions that bring you to your target:
  - Sit down for an hour with Gary from the infrastructure team to understand your dependencies.
  - Create an interface that abstracts your module's dependency from the other team's infrastructure.
  - Meet at least three times this week with the build guy to make sure your changes work well in the company's build system.
  - Create your own personal build that runs your integration tests for the module.

It wouldn't work because I don't really know if it can be done

- You can still commit to actions that will bring you closer to the target
- Instead of committing to fix all 25 remaining bugs before the release (which may not be possible), you can commit to these specific actions that bring you closer to that goal:
  - Go through all 25 bugs and try to recreate them.
  - Sit down with the QA who found each bug to see a repro of that bug.
  - Spend all the time you have this week trying to fix each bug.

It wouldn't work because sometimes I just won't make it

- Something unexpected might happen, but you still want to live up to expectations
- If you can't make your commitment, the most important thing is to raise a red flag as soon as possible to whoever you committed to
  - There will be time for the team to stop, reassess the current actions being taken, and decide if something can be done or changed
- If you don't tell anyone about the potential problem as soon as possible, you're not giving anyone a chance to help you follow through on your commitment.

The Other Side of "Try"

Marge asks Peter for status...

The Other Side of "Try" – Marge asks Peter for status

- Is Peter Making a commitment?
  - Perhaps Marge can't hear the wavering in Peter's statements, but he's certainly not making much of a commitment.
  - Marge is asking questions that demand boolean answers but Peter's boolean responses are fuzzy.
  - Notice the abuse of the word try.
  - In the last chapter we used the "extra effort" definition of try. Here, Peter is using the "maybe, maybe not" definition.

The Other Side of "Try"

How Peter should have responded…

The Other Side of "Try" – How Peter should have responded

- Why is this a better response?
  - In this case Peter's language is more honest.
  - He is describing his own uncertainty to Marge.
  - Marge may be able to deal with that uncertainty.

Committing with Discipline

But what if Marge really needs the modifications and documentation done by Friday?

Now Peter has a decision to make…

Committing with Discipline

- Should Peter Take Short Cuts?
- Peter might be tempted to break discipline at this point
  - He might be able to get done faster if he doesn't write his tests, doesn't refactor, or he doesn't run the full regression suite.
- This is where the professional draws the line
  - Peter is just wrong about his suppositions
    - He won't get done faster if he doesn't write his tests, doesn't refactor, omits the full regression suite.
    - Years of experience have taught us that breaking disciplines only slows us down.
- As a professional he has a responsibility to maintain certain standards
- Peter, as a professional, has already made a commitment to maintain these standards. All other commitments he makes should be subordinate to that. So, this whole line of reasoning needs to aborted.

Should Peter take short cuts?

What if Peter was the last option?

What if Peter was the last option?

- In this case Marge accepted Peter's answer and started hunting for other options. But what if all Marge's options have been exhausted? What if Peter were the last hope?

- So now Peter starts to think about working some significant overtime, and probably most of the weekend. He needs to be very honest with himself about his stamina and reserves. It's easy to say you'll get a lot done on the weekends, it's a lot harder to actually muster enough energy to do high-quality work.

- Professionals know their limits. They know how much overtime they can effectively apply, and they know what the cost will be. In this case Peter feels pretty confident that a few extra hours during the week and some time on the weekend will be sufficient.

- This is perfectly fair. Peter knows that he can get the modifications and documents done if he works the overtime. He also knows he'll be useless for a couple of days after that.

Chapter 3: Saying Yes - Summary

- Professionals are not required to say yes to everything that is asked of them
- They should find creative ways to make "yes" possible
- When professionals say yes, they use the language of commitment so that there is no doubt about what they've promised.
- Creating a language of commitment may sound a bit scary, but it can help solve many of the communication problems programmers face today—estimations, deadlines, and face-to-face communication mishaps
  - You'll be taken as a serious developer who lives up to their word, and that's one of the best things you can hope for in our industry

Professional Tip of the Day #1 : **Don't pay for graduate school!**

- Most STEM PhD programs can offer funding

- You would have to pay for some degrees (MBA, MD, JD, etc.)

- You can win your own funding (NSF GRFP, NDSEG, etc.)

- The CSE department has lots of funding opportunities:

https://www.unr.edu/cse/graduate-program/fellowships