



# Saying No and Hearing No: A short course for project people

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A presentation by Rick Brenner  
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## Core message

- Saying (or hearing) No can be difficult
- Problems come from the situation, from its dynamics, and from within ourselves
- We can learn how to accept reality and how to say No directly
- Saying your own No is more powerful than saying anyone else's Yes

## Synopsis

Knowing how to say no — and hear no — effectively is a critical skill for project people. Whether you're a sponsor, a functional manager, a project manager, a task manager or a team member, you might have to deny the request of another. This can lead to escalating pressure and tension.

Often, pressured parties tire of the tension, or fear sets in, and they “cave” — they yield to the pressure. At times, yielding leads to an agreement that simply cannot be fulfilled, which then threatens the project's success, and can even threaten the enterprise. When this happens, saying “no” — finding a way not to yield — is best for the health of the project.

## About Rick Brenner

Rick Brenner is principal of Chaco Canyon Consulting. He works with people in problem-solving organizations that are making products so novel or complex that they need state-of-the-art teamwork and stronger relationships between their people. In his 20 years as a software developer, software development manager, entrepreneur and consultant, he has developed valuable insights into the interactions between people in a technical environment, and between people and the technological media in which they work.



Mr. Brenner has held positions at Symbolics, Inc., and at Draper Laboratory, both of Cambridge, Massachusetts. At Symbolics, he led development of products based on

## Brief outline

- The structure of pressure situations
- Typical tactics of both sides
- The dynamics of saying yes and saying no
- The perils of saying yes inappropriately
- Traps and pitfalls when you say no
- Honest, direct, powerful ways to say no

When we understand the source of the tension, and the pressure tactics we all can use, we gain new tools for saying and hearing no.

The tools, though, are not enough. We must have access to them when we need them — *in the moment*, when we're stressed out and deeply involved in problematic communication. The experiential format of this program provides that access.

In this fun and interactive presentation, we learn how to accept and how to deliver bad news — honestly, directly and safely.

Macsyma, a computer algebra system. At Draper, he was a principal investigator in a DARPA program, the Evolutionary Design of Complex Software, where he conducted research into advanced concepts for software development environments based on dynamic object-oriented programming languages. Since 1993, he has taught a course in business modeling at the Harvard University Extension School.

Mr. Brenner holds a Masters Degree in Electrical Engineering from MIT. His current interests focus on improving personal and organizational effectiveness in abnormal situations, such as dramatic change, technical emergencies, and high-pressure project situations. He has written a number of essays on these subjects, available at his Web site, [www.ChacoCanyon.com](http://www.ChacoCanyon.com), and writes and edits a weekly email newsletter, *Point Lookout*.

