

# The Power of No

A few years ago, my wife read “The Birth Order Book” by Dr. Kevin Leman. I did not read it, but we discussed it so much I felt I had. She loved the way it explained some key differences in our three children.

I liked how it gave me a box in which to place my quirks.

Karen is fond of reminding me, “You are a middle born”. This she does when noticing I am once again trying to make every body happy.

It is the curse of the child between two others. The peacemaker who loves the older and the younger, but is confused by their lack of interest at even trying to get along.

A people pleaser, pursuing the impossible. I want everyone to like me. So says Dr. Leman. Somewhat true I say with embarrassment.

Its foolish. Not every one will like you. You cannot please all.

Still I try. Sometimes with a measure of force, which, by the way is the fastest way to create distance between friends.

Force? How do you force someone to like you? You don’t, really. But it don’t stop us from playing our games.

The real handicap in aspiring to be a crowd pleaser is we hate to say “No”. I’m getting better, but it still comes up.

## **The most important word**

What’s the first word you ever learned? I’ll bet it was “No”.

Today there is a dearth of parents who believe in being indulgent with children and giving them the freedom to express themselves.

“We just want Johnny to be his best. We don’t want to stifle him with discipline.”

Yikes! Hate to have that kid in front of you at the movie theater.

Think about this.

When you left the womb, you were the most selfish, materialistic, impatient creature on the planet. As bad as your spouse may tell you are now, you were at your worst at birth.

Look, I don’t hate babies.

I love them to pieces much as the next guy. I love them enough to teach them boundaries. Enough to let them hear a firm “no” over and over, so many times they utter it as their first word. It could well save their life someday.

Think about it. Baby wants to eat now. Baby wants fresh diaper now. Want, want, want. Now, now, now.

If an adult behaved this way, you’d run. Fast. Why? Not socially acceptable. Actually, a threat to society.

Responsible parents know that “no” may well be the most important word ever learned.

Think how saying it has helped you. Even saved you.

The creepy guy at the end of the block named Chester? Why’d you say no when he offered you candy? Mom and Dad taught you well, and the hair standing up on your neck told you to. This should come automatic, long before you discover your neighbor’s last name is ‘the Molester’.

When my kids were small we never once fought them to buckle their car seat. Not once. Not one child. Know why?

Car seats were non-negotiable. If you get in car, you get buckled. Simple as this.

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We see our friends struggle with their kids and we know.

Those parents said 'yes' when they shouldn't have. Only once. Kids never forget. Give in once, you will fight them forever. They remember.

One time, an older gentleman friend of ours was preparing to drive a car full one morning, including my wife and toddler son. Our friend was from the old school, where the right arm extended out is plenty safe enough for a panic stop.

He met his match in my wife. Looking at the crowded car and the baby seat in my wife's hand he said, "Oh, you don't need that. Just buckle him in."

She didn't fight him, she just said, "That's OK, we'll just take our car." It was the best lesson in saying no without saying it I've ever heard. The subtle suggestion worked and they were all soon safely motoring out.

If a baby catapults through a windshield, what would the grieving parent say? "I should have buckled him in, what was I thinking?" What they really mean is "I should have said no, when the baby wanted out."

No is incredibly important to you and learning PDR right now. Think of all you said no to, so you could be here. No to TV in the evenings. I'm going to practice instead. No to that golf club or other toy you wanted. I'm using those funds to buy another tool.

No to yourself when you wanted to quit. No to your tired self who longed to lay down and nap.

PDR has great rewards. It also has its share of angst. Times when no is the most important word you'll ever utter.

Know what? I actually for a time thought it might get easier. I mean, now that so many customers and body shops know about it. Now that insurance is mandating it for hail repair, I figured we'd have smooth sailing. Not so.

In some ways its worse. Harder than ever to say no.

Why?

PDR techs are pushing the envelope, fixing impossible junk, spending impossible hours to do so. I'm guilty. Got the before and after photos to prove it. But guess what. I don't always have time, motivation, or desire to fix the impossible.

I had this handed to me on a silver platter recently on a 2 month stint at a hail storm. Broken glass, obliterated panels, brand new cars declared as total losses. Only a few cars on the fringes of the storm had some fixable panels. No became my favorite word. But not enough. How come?

Imagine the setting.

When I arrived at the body shop, I took a walk with the owner and he pointed mockingly at a blue 911 Porsche with bowling ball dents in it.

"I've got a PDR guy coming in from Texas and he's going to fix that car."

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Huh? Who is this Superman of dents? Who is this man of Stainless Steel who surely knows stuff I do not? Have I been a pansy all along, turning down fenders with 50 fish bowls and paint cracked and flaking off?

My silence and facial expression were enough, I said nothing.

When the Texas superhero arrived, I must say I was relieved to know he was a firm “no” on this one. Perhaps even firmer than I.

I told him, “Boss said you gonna fix that car. You must know things I don’t.”  
“No, that car’s not fixable. All there is to it,” he said adamantly.

Here’s the thing. How many techs would have been duped into trying?

Believe me, this scenario is real and playing out way too often.

How bout you? Will you bite? If I were green and desperate, I believe I would have.

Years have taught me, I make more when I say no.

Which leads me to the big reason for this story of “no”.

I didn’t say no as often as I should have in the last two months.

“It would sure help me out if you could glue pull that double softball dent out of that rail.”  
(In gullible, clueless voice) “Duh, Ok. I will fix it, because I like you. Do you like me?”

Phooey.

Believe me, I’m grateful for the business, but also ashamed of not putting foot down. Also for sticking my head in the sand and refusing to look at the numbers. Had I done so, I would have been seriously kicking some

panels back to the body shop for paint repair.

The daily numbers and weekly numbers should have thrown red flags.

Just because you can, does not mean you should.

Words to live by. I keep forgetting. You will too.

What’s the root of the problem?

Yes, I’m middle born, but you are likely not. More to it than this.

Its fear based, yes. But its also a perspective problem. Our view of what we do may need adjusting.

What you do is like being a doctor. Make no mistake, you are a specialist, a surgeon if you will.

Which do you think carries more risk?

General Practitioner or Surgeon?

You bet your bippy. The surgeon has a life in his hands, not just a prescription pad.

What makes a good surgeon? One who takes charge and is willing to be a commander.

You have been placed in a unique position by the insurance companies. You get to say yes or no.

Prove it, you say?

Ok, just look at the estimates written in a hail catastrophe.

One car is very fixable with PDR, yet is written completely for body shop repair.

Another is whacked all the way down the doors with over stretched dents, has cracked paint and starting to rust. Yet its written all PDR.

A storm is chaos. A mess.

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Your task is do triage and kindly but firmly say this one is dying, paint it. This one I can save, put it in my stall.

Now, you know every piece of paper has a measure of authority, right?

Question is, as you hold the estimate in your hand, do you feel the pressure of conforming to what you see before you?

I do.

But an estimate from insurance is just a place to start. A snapshot of damage. A picture taken in bad lighting. Ready for you to bring into focus.

Here's where it gets tough.

When you first arrive, standing in front of you is a body shop manager salivating over the panels which were written for conventional repair. He wants that money for his techs, and he don't have to share it with you.

Greedy sucker.  
Here's the irony.

When I arrived at the storm and saw the damage, I told the owner, "Your paint shop will be buried."

"Huh?"

Should I explain to him why his paint shop is about to cause a bottleneck in his workflow and profits? Tell him all the partial PDR repairs will be run through by me quite fast and he still has to paint them?

I decided to let it go. Let him see.

By end of storm, same manager, same drooling look, but now, something was different.

The cars which had now been there for two months were owned by some not so happy people.

Angry phone calls tend to wear on a person. "Is there any way we can convert some of this to PDR?"

Middle born self was about to cost me some bucks.

The trouble with PDR is, some big stuff *can* be fixed. Sometimes pretty well. Others not so much.

One thing is sure, there often is not enough money to spend the time it takes.

How much would you charge to spend 6 hours on a rail? What if it took 8 or, even 10?

A rail is a tiny area. If you glue pull, its going to take a while.

If it gets fixed with plastic filler by body shop, its much quicker. But now its got to get painted. Along with the quarter panel.

What's the most you can charge on a rail? 600? 800? Not without raising eyebrows in the insurance realm.

Know what the body man gets? Eight hours tops. About \$350 plus paint. So how you gonna compete with that?

You can't.

So, here you are saying no to panels you know can be fixed. Saying no to the panel, yes, but this is not all. Not by a long shot.

### **No to your pride.**

You love a challenge, you want to do it. "I'll show them," so says your evil pride demon on left shoulder.

Manager knows this. Its why the question is phrased to you like this, "Can you fix this rail?"

Smacks you right in the pride.

Real question is this, "is it worth it?"

You've got two months to make the most you can. Better get good at no.

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### **No to pleasing your boss.**

This guy is signing your checks. Hopefully, big ones. You surely want to make him happy.

Remember this, he has two faces.

No, not in a bad way. I mean he has two goals.

Make as much as he can off you. Make you do stuff you don't want to do.

Why? So he can move cars through faster.

Trouble is you're about to say yes to a \$300 rail and spend all day on it.

Here's what you have to remember.

He halfway hates your guts.

Sure, he's happy to get cars done fast, but he loathes the fact you only give him a small percentage.

He cannot stand having your service forced down his throat by insurance.

It sticks in his craw to see the words PDR on an estimate coming to his shop. That he owns.

He does not like asking your permission to paint a panel.

Listen for it. If you are as good at passive aggressive behavior as I am, you can spot it a mile away in others. The body shop owner's true feelings can't hide for long.

So, even if he lets you think you guys are partners and you bend over backwards, he still don't like it.

You have to decide today what you want to be and how much you want to make.

You must be firm, because the manager is trying to squeeze you into his way of thinking.

This is what he wants:

He wants you to split the money in a more equitable way. Say, 60 for him, 40 for you. I mean, it is his shop after all. His customer too.

He wants you to push every panel, fixable by PDR or not. Push it up and let my guys skim coat it.

Yep, push to paint.

You think I'm making this up? Every single hail season for the last seven years I've had the same discussion with the same insurance adjuster about Push to Paints. He is a former body man who once owned a shop in the late 70's, early 80's.

"I tell every client this, 'I would not let any fool cut the top off my car/truck.'"

Then he launches into a tirade about throwing 500 bucks in front of a PDR tech in the offseason.

He actually said this. "I know if I throw 500 dollars to PDR and 1000 to paint it, I can get it done." Nonsense.

Think you'd want to spend all day on a top full of fish bowls for \$500? Takes an hour just to get one to stay up.

I hope you never do.

Here's the deal. Replacing a top is quite possibly the easiest panel to replace today.

Think about it. Most cars you're only talking about the section between the uniside rails.

Drill some welds, a little air chisel work and weld, or even glue on the new top.

Why are so many adjusters and even body men freaked out by this? I guess its over their head [sic].

Think this adjuster gets under my skin just a little? Yep. How many people you think he said the exact thing too this year? He writes 60 cars a day. So I'm guessing that broken record has played about 1000 times this year alone.

### **No to nonsense.**

You've got to say it. Or at least be around to reject it. Look, I acknowledge that getting a

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panel shipped as big as truck roof ain't always easy. Sometimes they get messed up. But its a cake repair for a good body man.

This is the kind of nonsense and half truths you have to buck on a near daily basis.

Here's a powerful tidbit for your battle against the bull stuff.

My son Derek was going over a PDR estimate with a very reasonable insurance adjuster from State Farm.

We'd been struggling with the thought for some time that if you don't fix every dent, you gotta knock some bucks off for the body shop. Even had one shop owner put it like this, "you can't charge for PDR and body work on an estimate."

Welcome to the Casino of PDR. Care to pull the one armed bandit that is your hail rod and see if you win? Roll the dice and get paid only if you can access it?

This SF adjuster put all this to rest.

"You can bet we are the first to hear about it if you can't fix it. The body shop guys like to rub our noses in it. We don't care. If you can't fix every dent, its now considered a push to paint panel. PDR is still the best first choice for us."

So here's what I'm saying "no" to starting now.

No more knocking money off for unsuccessful repairs.

Here's what I think is happening anyway. I believe the shops are supplementing these panels for extra body time and paint, then getting us to give up some of our money too. Dirty double dippers.

No more.

As Commander of this operating room, I'm taking charge. I say what gets transplanted

and what gets repaired. I'll do my best, but I get paid either way, live or die.

I hope you'll join me.

### **Coming full circle.**

The city where I started and ended.

A career in the body shop began, then ended for me eight years later in Oklahoma City.

Moved two hours away and began with PDR.

Now I've returned eighteen years later.

Why so long?

I mean, there's been hailstorms here, some good sized and long lasting. Why not make the two hour trip to my former hometown and push dents?

Good question.

Now that I'm here again, I know I've avoided it. The longer I'm here the less it makes sense.

Leaving was not that hard. Its a lovely city.

Nothing against the town personally.

Its just...

Its how I felt for so many years. I was avoiding the feelings I once knew, not the area itself.

Maybe you've done the same. A dark period you loathed. Pain by association. Being in or too near the place brings back the feelings, the fear.

What feeling?

When I lived here, I felt like a lackluster underachiever. A body technician who'd reached his peak. Worked in body shops long enough to know it. Just enough time to face the wall and say, "This is it." Your pinnacle. Your zenith moment. Where you knew the rocket would climb no more and was making its downward fall.

When I left in 1992, I was not coming back.

But now I know I missed opportunity. Could have capitalized better on former associates.

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Alas, can't go back.

Onward.

You? Have you a moment, a month, a year, an era you'd rather forget? Nothing makes you feel better than remembering a lesser time. You know what you once had and you appreciate what lies before you now. I do hope you experience it. If you want it you will.

### **Your answer?**

Going back to the same body shop I worked at 18 years ago as a PDR tech has shown me this. What you do, or are learning to do is extremely valuable. It is also not appreciated for what it is.

You can be in a shop full of guys who are very much aware they cannot do what you just did. Yet, they will also pooh-pooh the value of it. Jealousy, self-loathing, too many chemicals ingested, it all comes into play.

If you take only one thing from this letter, let it be this. There are many people who *potentially* could do what you do. But they don't. Why not?

They haven't taken the time, the money, the investment in self that you have. You have more, because you gave more to get it. You are where you are because you cultivated a life different from what you once had.

When someone comes along and asks you to give yourself away on the cheap, what are you gonna say?

I thought so.

Tim

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