You can be considerate and respectful – and still say no.

The point here is you want to be able to manage your workload without going haywire –

This is the most respectful thing to do sometimes for you, for your company and even for the colleague who is asking you to take on more. Here are my top tips for how to graciously decline a request:

Think before you act.

Don't give your answer immediately. You can weigh your options and limitations and get back to him or her. And then make sure you get back to them.

"To be honest, I'm not sure if I can help you this time because of my workload. I'm afraid I might not be able to give it my full attention. But let me get back to you on that tomorrow morning."

Accentuate the positive; answer respectfully.

Appreciate the opportunity and still say no.

"I'm glad that we work closely enough that you feel you could ask me this. I'm sorry I can't help you this time – I have a couple other deadlines I have to meet."

Give a reason when possible.

You want the colleague feeling positive as he or she walks away. And the reason needs to be

real – not a fabrication. Lies will always come back to bite you.

Be straight about the future.

If you don't want to leave the door open for a next ask, be clear. State your reason and then stop talking.
"I appreciate your request but I have several priorities and can't take on the extra work."

Respectfully listen.

Sometimes when you say no, your colleagues will understand; other times, they will be confused, hurt or angry. You will build the relationship by listening to their angst – and acknowledging it.

Stand your ground.

Don't give in to flattery or bullying. You need to remember that the problem is his or her – not yours. Sometimes we can be team players – and should be team players – and sometimes we just can't.

"No" language examples.

- Not now but later…

"I'm on a deadline, I can't take anything more on until it's finished. Can I follow up with you on Friday?"

- Talking to your manager…

"Does this take priority over what you've asked me to finish by Tuesday by 2:00?"

- Closing the door…

"Thanks for asking me but you need to know that I can't take on any more work – I need to

focus on my top responsibilities.”

The number one priority in saying no is to decrease your stress while still building a professional relationship with the colleague you’ve turned down. It can be done!

For more information on Emily Post Business Etiquette Programs contact Director of Sales and Relationships, Dawn Stanyon at Dawn@emilypost.com.