

business issues

PERMISSION: GRANTED

BY SARAH BATEMAN

Know what you want
to contribute before
the meeting starts.



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Give yourself a permission slip to be significant and successful.

JOAN WAS SITTING at a round table when a hand descended over her right shoulder and slapped a piece of paper down on the wooden surface. A permission slip lay before her.

Joan wondered, “Why do I need a permission slip?” She glanced up at her colleague, Cheryl, who said, “You’ve been thinking about honing your presentation skills for decades. Why haven’t you? Here’s your permission slip.”

“Why *haven’t* I?” Joan thought. She was right. It was her choice to dream but never act. It was her choice to exist but never take the risks to improve her life. Joan was expected to give presentations at work. Her presentation style was somewhat lacking; she sometimes appeared nervous, and it was obvious to others that public speaking wasn’t an area in which she was particularly confident.

Joan noticed that her self-limiting routines and beliefs were affecting both her personal and professional lives. She had to remind herself that her presence was significant, and so she began creating her own permission slips to succeed.

Be Brave! Make Mistakes

Joan’s first permission slip to becoming significant and successful was to allow herself to make mistakes. This is the natural growth and learning process when we’re children. If you’re not willing to allow yourself to do something badly, you are not allowing yourself to change, you are not allowing yourself to grow and you are not allowing yourself to master new skills.

Do you feel uncomfortable placing yourself in unfamiliar situations? Have you avoided seeking new responsibilities at work because you didn’t want to look foolish? Research shows that it is important to become perpetual beginners. This is especially true as we age. Learning new skills makes you more flexible and ready to compete in this chaotic world. Successful working professionals are willing to become beginners over and over again. They are willing to let go of being the expert.

There are strategies that can help you undertake new challenges. One is to break your routine. Do you find yourself on autopilot often? Are your days carbon copies of each other? Set the intention to try something new. You might speak up more in a meeting or seek new functions at work. Find a friend or coworker to support you.

Be Heard, Be Seen

Speaking of speaking up more, Joan’s second permission slip was to let herself be heard and seen. She was practically nonexistent during her early years at the office. Her first presentation was a moment of silence; she literally could not speak. Her struggles with connecting at work or in networking situations were drastically impacting her professional life. She needed to give herself the permission slip to speak up, and to do so with confidence.

How would being seen and heard change your business life? Would you gain more respect from those around you? Would you be able to build trust and relationships? If you are not seen and heard, you are not known—and opportunities and promotions will pass you by because you don’t stick out in people’s minds.

Deciding to be seen and heard can take courage. One starting point is setting your intention before you attend a meeting or meet a client. Know what you want to contribute. Know what ideas you would like to share. Once you're at a meeting, make sure you speak up early. The longer you wait to speak, the harder it will be. Make eye contact with others in the room and use open body language. Be sure you are not creating a barrier between yourself and anyone else in the room. Remember: You want to be accessible at this time.

Be Willing to Say No

Joan's third permission slip was to learn to say no. In the office, she was very accommodating. Basically, she never said no. The supervisors loved her. They got into the habit of bringing her rush files just before quitting time. They would drop them at her desk and head home while she stayed to complete the work. But Joan eventually learned how important it was to shorten her *yes* list. Do you have too many *yesses* in your life?

If so, it's time to recall the benefits of saying no. Learning to say no, when it's appropriate to do so, gives you more control over your life so you don't overextend yourself. It is a way of learning to respect yourself, which will lead to others respecting you as well. Saying no gives you more time to yourself, which is a precious commodity in today's chaotic world. You will have more energy and time so that when opportunities appear, you will be available to take them.

Before saying yes, ask yourself the following questions:

1. Is this something I truly want to do?
2. What am I saying no to if I say yes to this?
3. What will I gain by going to this event or doing this task?
4. When I need help, will this person reciprocate?
5. If I don't do this, how will I use my time instead?

If you decide to say no to someone, let them know as quickly as possible so they can make other plans. Maybe you can help the other person out by suggesting an alternative.

Permit Yourself

Now ask yourself, what aren't you giving yourself permission to do? What are the dreams that have escaped you until now? When Joan began following her three permission slips, she began enjoying her work life more. By allowing herself to make mistakes, she felt less pressure to be perfect. She gained the confidence to learn new skills that made her more valuable to the team. When she began speaking up at meetings, she learned that she had good ideas to contribute. She was more valued by the team. When Joan said no to extra, unexpected work, she was able to focus on her responsibilities. If you're struggling like Joan was, write yourself the same three permission slips. They will better your work life and make you a more valuable and happier contributor to the team. ■