

deliberately made a loud noise. His wife instantly woke up, as did the “stranger,” who turned out to be his mother.

“What is the meaning of this?” he yelled. “I almost killed you both!”

“We were afraid of robbers,” his wife explained. “So I dressed your mother up in your samurai clothes to scare them off.”

A year passed and the fisherman came to see the samurai. “I had an excellent year, so here is your money back and with interest,” the fisherman said happily to him.

“Keep your money,” replied the samurai. “You repaid your debt long ago.”

When you want to say No, remember the samurai’s lesson: do not react out of anger—or indeed out of any negative emotion such as fear or guilt. Take a deep breath and focus on your purpose—your Yes—in this situation. Ask yourself what you really want and what is really important here. In other words, shift from being reactive and focused on No, to being proactive and focused on Yes.

This chapter outlines a process that can help you. As the samurai did, you start by stopping and collecting your wits. You then proceed to ask yourself *why*. Why do you want to say No? What are your underlying interests, needs, and values? Once you have answered this question, you can then crystallize your *Yes!*—your intention to protect what matters most to you.

Stop: Go to the Balcony

We do not have a chance of being able to influence the other unless we are first able to control our own natural reactions and emotions.

When we want to say No to an offensive behavior or inappropriate demand, it is only natural to feel angry. But anger can blind us. In the rush to say No, angrily and sometimes vengefully, it is all too easy to lose sight of the prize—advancing our interests. Fear too can prevent us from pursuing our objectives. We imagine in advance the other’s reaction to our No. What will they think of us or do to us? What will happen to our relationship, to the deal, and thus to our interests? Paralyzed, we accommodate, giving up on our needs. Guilt has a similar effect. “Who am I to say No?” “I don’t deserve the time to myself.” “Their needs are more important than mine.”

Anger can blind, fear can paralyze, and guilt can weaken.

The first challenge we face, therefore, is internal. Recall the example of the man who said No to his domineering father, who was also his boss. In John's own words, "I didn't stand up to my *dad*, I stood up to my *fears*!" As John recognized, the real obstacle to getting what he wanted was not his father; it was his own fears. "All the action was basically over by the time I spoke to him." That is the key point. *The real action of standing up for yourself takes place inside you before you say No.*

This internal action starts with stopping. Stopping is all-important because it interrupts your natural reaction, buys you time to think, and thus allows you to uncover your Yes. You may stop for a second, an hour, a day, or however long is required. What matters is to stop and get some perspective on the situation before proceeding with your No.

I like to use the metaphor of "going to the balcony." The balcony is a detached state of mind you can access anytime you choose. Imagine yourself for a moment as an actor on a stage about to speak your lines—your No. Now picture yourself up on a balcony overlooking the stage, a place where you can see the scene clearly from afar. The balcony is a place of perspective, calm, and clarity. From a balcony perspective, it is much easier to uncover the Yes behind your No.

I came to truly appreciate this lesson when I was asked to facilitate a difficult discussion in the mid-1990s between Russian and Chechen leaders about how to end the tragic war in Chechnya. This discussion took place at the Peace Palace in The Hague in the very same conference room used for the international tribunal on war crimes in the former Yugoslavia. The Chechen vice president began his long speech by making a series of vociferous accusations against the Russians, saying they should stay in that room because they themselves would soon be on trial for war crimes. He then turned to me and, looking me right in the eye, began attacking: "You Americans have been supporting the Russians in their war crimes! And, what is more, you are violating the rights of self-determination of the people of Puerto Rico!" As he went on with his accusations, others around the table looked at me to see how I would respond. Would I say No to the round of accusations?

I felt defensive and distracted, thinking, "I don't like the turn this conversation is taking. Why is he attacking *me*? I'm just trying to help. Puerto Rico? What do I know about Puerto Rico?" I felt reactive. Should I just accept this treatment? Should I respond in kind? Should I say nothing at all?

Fortunately, the translation time gave me a chance to go to the balcony. I took a deep breath and tried to calm myself. Our purpose, I remembered, was to try to bring peace to the people in Chechnya and Russia. That was my Yes. On that basis, I was ready to say No to this vein of accusation that would lead us nowhere.

When my turn came to respond, I simply said to the Chechen vice president, “I hear your criticism of my country and I take it as a sign that we are among friends and can speak candidly with each other. I know your people have suffered terribly. What we are here to do is to find a way to stop the suffering and bloodshed in Chechnya. Let us try to come up with some practical steps that can be taken today.” The discussion got back on track. Going to the balcony enabled me to uncover my Yes.

Take a Time-Out

These days the scarcest resource is time to think. Look for opportunities to go to the balcony whenever possible so that you can reflect on your Yes.

When you want to take a time-out, rote phrases can come in handy. If the other is making an unwanted demand, for instance, you could say:

- “I’m sorry, but this is not a good time to talk about this. Let’s talk about it this afternoon.”
- “Let me think about it and I’ll get back to you tomorrow.”
- “I need to consult my partner.”
- “Let me make a phone call to check something first.”

If the other is behaving offensively, you could use a phrase like:

- “Why don’t we take a break?”
- “Time-out for five minutes.”
- “Would you excuse me? I need a coffee refill.”

Achok, a Tibetan friend of mine, once told me: “‘Yes’ and ‘No’ are very important phrases, but another phrase that is really important sometimes is ‘wait a minute.’ Sometimes you don’t know whether to say Yes or No. So the best answer is ‘wait a

minute,' which gives you the time to decide." Achok was right. Before saying No, it is often wise to wait a minute.

During the time-out, step out of the room for a moment. Use the moment of quiet to think or consult with a colleague. Imagine it is a customer pressing you for what you fear may be an unrealistic delivery date. In his presence, you might be inclined to agree but, after talking with your colleague on the phone, you realize this would be a big mistake. Giving yourself a chance to reflect before responding can make all the difference between a reactive Yes and a proactive No.

If you are feeling angry or fearful, go for a walk or engage in your favorite form of exercise. Getting your muscles working and your heart pumping can help discharge anger and reduce fear so when you do say No, you can say it from a place of calm and balance.

Listen to Your Emotions

What causes us to react are our negative emotions. Fear and guilt drive us to accommodate or avoid, while anger drives us to attack. Acting out our emotions only gets in the way of our being able to pursue our purpose. Yet suppressing our emotions does not work either. Rather than making our feelings disappear, suppression merely drives them underground, from where they leak out at inopportune moments.

Fortunately, there is a third way to deal with our emotions, far less dramatic than acting them out and far less stressful than suppressing them. *Become aware of your emotions* and, in so doing, take control of them rather than let them take control of you. *The most effective way to deal with your negative emotions is not to act them out. It is to hear them out.*

Consider the example of a friend of mine who was having great difficulties persuading her three-year-old daughter to go to preschool. Whenever the time would come to go to school, the daughter would throw a fit and make a scene, insisting on staying home. The mother did not know how to say No effectively. Feeling anguished, fearful, guilty, angry, and frustrated all at once, she would seesaw between hard-edged insistence (attack) and giving in to her daughter's tantrums (accommodate).

One day, the mother took a different tack. She took time to prepare her No, talking with a close friend about her feelings. With her friend's help, she was able to trace her anxiety back to her own need for love and belonging. She came to realize that her anxiety around sending her child to school came from her own childhood feelings of abandonment by *her* mother. Since she knew that she loved her daughter and that sending her to school was not a form of abandonment, she was able to relax and let go of the

anxiety she was feeling. The next day, she simply said No to her daughter's insistence on staying home: "You are going to school today." No hesitation, no edge, just a matter-of-fact announcement. To her surprise, there was no resistance and no scene. Her daughter went to school quietly and willingly.

As you trace your emotions back to your underlying needs, a subtle transformation can take place, as it did for my friend. Once you have truly understood the hidden message of your emotions, once they have delivered their message and accomplished their mission, their intensity usually subsides and you grow calmer, more centered, and more effective. Once you have truly heard out your feelings, you do not need to act them out.

So begin by naming your fear or anger or guilt. Recognize them as natural reactions to the other's demand or behavior. Listen to them the way you would listen to a good friend. Let them express themselves fully to you.

Observe your emotions almost as if you were a neutral witness: "I *notice* some feelings of anger inside of me." You are not being cold and distant, just studying your emotions with interest and concern as a friend might. It may help to describe them to a friend or to write them down in a journal.

Think of yourself as "having" or "experiencing" your emotions rather than "being" them. Consider the difference between "I *am* angry" and "I *have* a feeling of anger inside me." The first identifies you directly as your emotion; it sounds almost as if that is all you are. When you *are* your emotions, you may naturally be impelled to act them out. In contrast, the language of "have" allows you to experience the emotions without feeling possessed by them. *You* have the emotions; *they* don't have you.

Keep Asking Yourself Why

Once you are on the balcony and in control of your emotions, you can now proceed to uncover the underlying motivations for your No. A simple but powerful technique is to keep asking yourself the magical question "Why?"

Uncover Your Interests

No is a position, a concrete stance, a statement of what you do not want. Interests, by contrast, are the wants, desires, aspirations, and concerns underlying the No. If your position is No to your co-worker's smoking in the office, for example, your interests

may be a desire for fresh, clean air and a need for healthy lungs. Interests are the silent movers and drivers behind positions. Interests, in other words, are what you would like to say Yes to.

Think for a moment of what exactly you would like to say No to. What is the demand or request you would like to refuse? What is the behavior you find inappropriate or offensive? Picture this in your mind—be very concrete and specific.

Now ask yourself what Yes lies behind your No. The answer isn't always obvious. While we usually know our position, often we haven't probed for our underlying interests.

I remember one mediation process in which I spent a few days with the commanders of a separatist movement who had been fighting for twenty-five years for the independence of their people. They had, in other words, been issuing a very loud and violent No. My first question for them was: "I understand your *position*: independence. But tell me about your *interests*. In other words, *why* do you want independence? What underlying interests are you hoping independence will satisfy?" There ensued a long silence and then a somewhat awkward struggle to answer the question.

The commanders knew their *position*. It was crystal clear. But the truth was that they could not fully articulate their interests. Was their chief interest economic—a fair share of the region's rich natural resources? Was it political—the ability to run their own affairs and elect their own parliament? Was it security—the ability to defend their people against physical threats to their lives and well-being? What did they really want and in what order of priority? Here they had been fighting for years, at the cost of thousands of lives, yet they had not systematically thought through *why* they were really fighting.

Digging beneath your position to understand your interests, and asking "Why?" again and again, is not merely an academic exercise. It is hard to satisfy your real interests if you are not sure what they are. The commanders, as they readily acknowledged, were unlikely anytime soon to obtain their position of independence through military means. In the medium term, however, they had the opportunity to advance their interests in recognition, self-rule, and control over their economic resources through an agreement on democratic elections, which they were confident they would win. Local political control in turn might move them further toward their long-term goal of independence. Uncovering the interests underlying their position helped lead them, eventually, over a period of years, into an unexpected peace agreement with their adversaries.

It is essential to keep asking the *why* question because the fuel needed to be able to say No effectively comes ultimately not from your position but from what lies behind your position: your underlying interests, your Yes.

Remembering the three great gifts of No can help you discern your interests. Ask yourself:

• What am I seeking to *create* by saying No? What other activity or person am I wanting to say Yes to?

• What am I seeking to *protect* by saying No? What core interest of mine is at risk if I say Yes or simply continue to accept the other's behavior?

• What am I seeking to *change* by saying No? What is wrong with the other's current behavior (or the situation) and what would be improved if that behavior (or situation) changed?

Uncover Your Needs

It is useful to probe even deeper into your underlying motivation. Often, when we list our interests, we are really listing our *wants*—our everyday desires, aspirations, and concerns. These are the things or conditions we would like to have, often very much. We want our office to be comfortable, the deal to be profitable, the vacation to be relaxing, and the price to be affordable. If we probe deeper, we will find underneath these wants a set of core motivations—our *needs*.

Needs are the basic drives that motivate human behavior. Perhaps the five most common basic human needs are:

- Safety or survival
- Food, drink, and other life necessities
- Belonging and love
- Respect and meaning

- Freedom and control over one's fate

Basic human needs underlie everyday behavior. Imagine your boss has asked you to work for the third weekend in a row, and you want to say No because you and your spouse have longstanding plans to go away. Your interests, as you first think about it, are to get away, to be able to keep your plans, and not to feel overworked. But to get at the underlying basic needs, you need to keep asking yourself *why you really* want to say No. Beneath the interest in getting away is an interest in strengthening your marriage, and beneath that, if you dig deeper, is a basic need for belonging and love. Beneath the interest in keeping your plans is the basic need for autonomy and control over your fate. Beneath the feeling of resentment at being overworked by your boss is a basic need for respect.

A sales manager, a participant in one of my seminars, was having trouble saying No to his biggest customer, who was continually pressing him for more and more price reductions. "What is your underlying Yes?" I asked him.

"Maintaining a steady stream of revenue," he replied.

"But why?" I pressed him.

"Profit," he said.

"But *why* do you want profits?" I asked again.

"So we can all work," he said, gesturing at his colleagues, "and so I can put food on my family's table." It boiled down to this basic need. The sales manager's No to his customer's demands became more powerful because it was rooted in something he cared deeply about.

It pays to dig deep in uncovering your needs. The deeper you go, the more likely you are to hit bedrock, a place of strength and stability that can anchor your No.

To uncover your needs, listen to your emotions. Emotions have intelligence—they are the language used by your core needs to signal that they are not being met. Fear alerts us to possible threat. Anger tells us that something in the situation is wrong and may need to be corrected. Guilt alerts us to be sensitive to important relationships. Gut feelings can warn us that a deal we are about to sign ought to be reconsidered. If we can listen to these feelings rather than react to them, we can benefit greatly.

That certainly has been my own experience. I have learned to listen to my gut feelings when I am faced with an important decision such as whether to accept a major work engagement. I have found that those gut feelings are almost inevitably correct, pointing to needs that I haven't properly addressed. If I get a queasy feeling about accepting a new project, for example, it usually means I am overlooking my need for more family or personal time.

Treat your emotions as signposts, pointing at your core needs. Rather than being your enemy, your emotions can become your ally, for they can help you uncover your Yes.

Uncover Your Values

Alongside the needs that drive you are the values that motivate you. Values are the principles and beliefs that guide your life. They are evoked by such phrases as "Always act with integrity" or "Treat everyone fairly." While values vary from culture to culture and from individual to individual, certain values are widely held in common around the world, including honesty, integrity, respect, tolerance, kindness, solidarity, fairness, courage, and peace.

Values can provide strong motivation for you to be able to say No. It is often easier for people to take a stand on behalf of something larger than themselves than it is to take a stand for their own personal needs.

Recall the story of Sherron Watkins, the Enron employee who had the courage to write a memo to her boss, CEO Kenneth Lay, expressing her strong concern about the unethical and illegal accounting practices then taking place at Enron, and warning that the company "could implode in a wave of accounting scandals." Tragically, her memo went unheeded and the giant energy corporation fell into bankruptcy and criminal investigation, causing thousands of unsuspecting employees to lose their jobs and life's savings. While her memo did not save Enron, her courageous action of standing up for what was right was given widespread publicity; she was named one of *Time* magazine's people of the year, and held up as a role model that will surely encourage others to do what they can to prevent future Enrons.

In saying No to illegal and unethical accounting practices at Enron, Sherron Watkins was saying Yes to her values of honesty and integrity. Even though Watkins expected to be fired for her memo, "there was no option about whether or not she was going to send it. She knew she had to say something," her mother later told the *Washington Post*. It was a question of values. As Sherron Watkins' story suggests, uncovering your underlying values can provide the motivation necessary to deliver a powerful and positive No.

Reach Down to Your Core

As you uncover your needs and values, it is useful to ask yourself the question: “What really matters?” What are your true priorities?

The prospect of saying No often triggers self-doubt and anxiety. You find yourself asking, “Can I actually do it, and if I say No, will I be able to stick to it?” To counter your inner critic, it is essential to dig deep down to your core, your true self, that place of inner certainty and conviction. Just as John, in the example described in the Introduction, dug deep to find the self-respect that allowed him to stand up to his father, so you too can reach down to the core of self-respect that will enable you to stand up and say No.

Keep probing. What is your deeper purpose? What is true and right for you? What is the message from your heart and soul?

One senior manager I know was offered a tempting promotion at work, but it would mean a lot of travel away from home. “I have small children,” he told me. “So, even though the opportunity was very difficult to pass up, I said No.” He said No in order to say Yes to being with his children. His children were what mattered to him most. Fortunately, not long afterward he was offered another job that allowed him to work close to home.

This exercise applies not only to individuals but also to leaders of organizations or nations who must discern their true priorities. This was the challenge faced by James Burke, chairman of the pharmaceutical company Johnson & Johnson, when he learned that one child and six adults in the Chicago area had died of poisoning from ingesting Tylenol. Apparently someone had laced the capsules with deadly cyanide and then put them back on the store shelves. Tylenol was the company’s most profitable product, commanding 35 percent of the market in over-the-counter painkillers. The question arose of whether to order a nationwide recall. Many experts inside and outside the company cautioned against it, arguing that the incidents were limited to the Chicago area and that the poisoning was not Johnson & Johnson’s fault. But Burke and his colleagues knew exactly what to do. They ordered the entire supply of the product withdrawn from the shelves of pharmacies and drugstores and, furthermore, offered to exchange all of the existing Tylenol capsules in people’s homes for Tylenol tablets. This one decision, taken almost immediately, cost the company tens of millions of dollars. In effect, the company said No to continuing to sell Tylenol until they were absolutely confident they could guarantee their customers’ safety.

Where did this courageous and enlightened No come from? As Burke and his colleagues explained later, it came directly from consulting the company’s credo, written

forty years earlier by its visionary president Robert Wood Johnson: “We believe our first responsibility is to the doctors, nurses, and patients, to mothers and fathers and all those who use our products and services.” Profits were important, of course, but they came second to the customers’ health and safety. Knowing and believing in these core values, everyone in the company knew what to do and instantly got behind the recall decision.

The result? Contrary to conventional wisdom, which held that there was no way the Tylenol brand could recover from the disaster, Tylenol was relaunched within months under the same name in a new tamper-resistant bottle and proceeded to achieve an astonishing recovery in sales and market share. What could easily have turned into a disaster in public confidence for Johnson & Johnson became a confirmation in the public’s eyes of the company’s integrity and credibility.

So when you are about to say No, it pays to follow the example of James Burke and consult your basic mission and core values. What do you and your organization truly stand for? Think not just of your short-term interest and immediate desires, but of your long-term interest as well. Think not just of your narrow self-interest but also of your enlightened self-interest. It serves us well to listen, as Burke and his colleagues did, to “the better angels of our nature,” in Abraham Lincoln’s famous phrase.

The goal is to find the deepest source of your No and connect with it. The deeper you go into your Yes, the stronger your No will be.

Crystallize Your Yes!

Now that you have uncovered your deepest interests, needs, and values, you can distill them into a powerful *Yes!* Your *Yes!* is your *intention* to protect and advance your core interests. Needs and values are where you come from; intention is where you want to go. Intention adds to your interests the element of commitment. You don’t just have the interest; you make a commitment to fulfilling it. “True strength does not come from physical capacity,” declared Mahatma Gandhi. “It comes from an indomitable will.” Few things in life are as strong as a clear intention.

The most powerful intentions are positive. They are *for*, not *against*. Think of Nelson Mandela, who spent over forty years fighting the racist system of apartheid in South Africa. The title of his autobiography makes clear what positive intention kept him going through decades of hard struggle and imprisonment. He chose to call his memoir not *Long Walk Away from Apartheid* but rather *Long Walk to Freedom*. His most essential commitment was not *against* apartheid but rather *for* freedom—freedom for himself, for his people, and even for his adversaries.

Distill a Single Intention

Your intention is not something you invent but rather something you crystallize from your interests, needs, and values. What can give real power to your No is to distill all your varied motivations into a single, concentrated intention—your *Yes!*

Uncovering your interests, needs, and values is a divergent activity in which you go from a single position of No to many possible motivations behind it. Creating a single intention is a convergent activity in which you go from many motivations to one intention that sums them all up. If your interests are like the roots of the tree, the base of the trunk where all the roots converge is like your intention.

Begin by making a list of the interests that are motivating you to want to say No and then try to sum them up in a single phrase that best captures their essence. For John, the man who said No to his domineering father, that phrase was “self-respect.” For my relative who said No to his alcoholism, that phrase was “being with my grandchildren.” Ask yourself: “What am I truly standing up for? What overriding value or need am I protecting? Is it my happiness, my family’s well-being, my company’s brand, my personal integrity, or is it something else?”

For a senior executive of a prominent international hotel chain, the Yes was to his brand. He faced the challenge of saying No to the powerful owner of a Caribbean resort hotel within the chain who was demanding exceptions to the brand standards as construction on the new hotel neared completion. The executive said No, not as a matter of mere policy but because he realized that the brand was the company’s main asset. “Our brand means nothing if we do not adhere to our standards,” he later explained to me. Having uncovered and crystallized his Yes, he did not find it hard to say No to the owner, saying that “The reason why you and others want our brand on your hotel is that we do not make exceptions on matters of quality.”

Since your intention is often general, it is helpful to give it specificity by envisioning a positive outcome that would fulfill your intention. Ask yourself: “What kind of concrete solution would satisfy my interests?” Use your mind’s eye to visualize the outcome you aspire to, just as athletes often do before a competition. Exactly what would it look like if the other agreed to respect your needs? This kind of concrete visualization can help give you the confidence and conviction you need to succeed.

It also helps to write down your intention and even announce it to a colleague or a friend. It will remind you of your commitment to yourself.

Distinguish Between *Whether* and *How*

Sometimes we may find ourselves thinking, “I would like to say No, but there’s no way I can imagine saying No to my mother, boss, or friend.” We sabotage our intention to say No even before we speak with the other.

“I don’t see how I can say No,” you may say to yourself when good friends ask you to help them move. You know you don’t have the time right now, but your mind floods with so much guilt and fear that it just seems inconceivable to say No. So you give in and say OK. Afterward, the regret, resentment, and anger set in—because saying Yes was the last thing you wanted to do at that point.

For many of us, this happens every day. And it springs from the common practice of mixing up *whether* to do something with *how* to do it. We confuse the question of whether or not we will say No with the question of how we will say No. Since the *how* seems impossible, the *whether* seems predetermined. In fact, to make ourselves feel better, we rationalize to ourselves, “It’s OK with me. I didn’t really need the time to myself anyway.”

There is an alternative, however. It is to distinguish in your own decision-making process between the *whether* and the *how*. Clarify your true intention first as you consider what you really want to do in this situation. Once the question of *whether* is resolved, then you can consider the *how*, which may turn out to be easier than your fears would lead you to believe.

Turn Your Emotions into Resolve

Once you have clarified your intention, it is time to give it energy. That energy can come from your emotions, properly harnessed.

In addition to serving as warning signals of unmet needs, emotions play another critical function: they provide fuel for action. They impel us to take appropriate action to protect our core interests, giving us courage and resolve. As champion athletes know well, emotions, if directed properly, can provide enormous motivational power.

So instead of letting your emotions drive you, harness them and channel them into resolve—the will to address your unmet needs and advance your deepest values. Your positive intention does not come out of a vacuum, but rather *grows* out of your emotions.

No one understood and demonstrated this process of transformation better than Mahatma Gandhi, who, without a single weapon or man under arms, succeeded in putting an end to the centuries-long colonial domination of India by the British Empire. He explained his secret as follows: “I had learned through bitter experience the one supreme lesson to conserve my anger, and as heat is transmuted into energy, even so our anger controlled can be transmuted into a power which can move the world.”

To transform negative emotion into positive intention, first observe and *accept* your emotions, tracing them back to their source in unmet interests and needs. Watch the emotional charge shift from negative to positive as you listen deeply to your feelings. Then, as Gandhi suggested, *conserve* your energy. In other words, refrain from impulsive reaction, which is only a reckless waste of your precious energy. Finally, at the right moment, purposely *release* your emotional energy as resolve. Use it as fuel for appropriate action, not reaction. Let it serve as sustained motivational power for your No.

“Gandhi taught me at age twelve that anger is as useful and powerful as electricity,” writes Mahatma Gandhi’s grandson Arun, “but only if we use it intelligently. We must learn to respect anger as we do electricity.”

In truth, there are no intrinsically negative emotions, only negatively charged emotions, which have the potential to become positively charged. Emotions such as fear and anger can be either destructive or constructive, depending on how you deal with them—as I learned during a very tense public gathering in Venezuela.

At the height of political tensions in Venezuela in 2003, at a time when many international observers feared an outbreak of civil war, I was invited by the United Nations to facilitate a daylong meeting of citizen leaders, including both ardent supporters and bitter opponents of President Hugo Chávez. The meeting was open to anyone, and the venue was an old theater in downtown Caracas seating five hundred people. Close to a thousand people showed up, and the National Guard was called out for fear violence might erupt between partisan groups. Naturally, the atmosphere in the room was charged with fear and tension. After introductions by several high-level international dignitaries, the podium was handed over to me to facilitate the meeting.

Acting on an intuition, I asked the participants to visualize for themselves concrete images of the destructiveness of the conflict—someone they knew who had been wounded or killed, a lost job, a broken friendship or family tie, a child’s nightmare, whatever it might be for them. Then I asked them, “What Spanish word would you use to say No to the political violence?” The word several audience members suggested was “*Basta!* Enough!” So I said, “OK, then, I want to ask you a favor. I would like to hear for one moment the voice of the Venezuelan people, a voice that until now has been silenced, the voice of sanity. Keeping your personal image of the conflict in mind, I would

like to ask you to call out together ‘*Basta*’ with all the emotion you feel. Will you do this for me?” They nodded. On the count of three, a loud “*Basta!*” swept the room. It was powerful. I still felt some holding back, perhaps driven by shyness, so I asked them to please repeat it. They did, and it was very strong. I asked them one final time, and with this third “*Basta!*” the entire theater shook to its rafters.

I mention this story because the atmosphere in the room changed perceptibly at that moment. Without overstating, I would say that the negatively charged emotions of fear and anger shifted into a positively charged intention to help put an end to the destructiveness of the conflict. As if to confirm this, that very afternoon in the theater the participants organized a committee to work together for peace in Venezuela. They met weekly and began to organize dialogues, street theater, radio and TV programs, school programs, and youth dances, all intended to reduce tensions and promote understanding. Three years after the fact, at the time of this writing, they are still going strong. They have grown into a social movement they call *Aquí Cabemos Todos*, meaning “here we all fit.” It is fair to say that they have made a genuine difference in their own lives and that of their country.

Here is the lesson: you can use your emotions to mobilize yourself to say No and stand up for what is important to you. Anxiety, fear, and anger bring you the gift of transformative energy, which is precisely what you need to make internal and external changes. If you are able to hear them out respectfully instead of acting them out destructively, these emotions can become your friends and allies. They can give you the guts to say No—a full-bodied, deep-bellied, strong-voiced No.

Uncover Your Yes

Uncovering your Yes accomplishes three useful tasks:

- *It grounds you in something positive.* You can now stand on your feet without standing on their toes. Your No can be *for* your needs, not *against* the other. Instead of rejecting the other by saying No, you can simply say Yes to what matters most to you.
- *It gives you a sense of direction.* You now know where you are going with your No.
- *It gives you energy.* You now have the fuel to deliver your No and to sustain it in the face of resistance.