

# life lessons

PERENNIAL PEOPLE PLEASER DAWN PORTER DISCOVERS THE POWER OF SAYING 'NO'



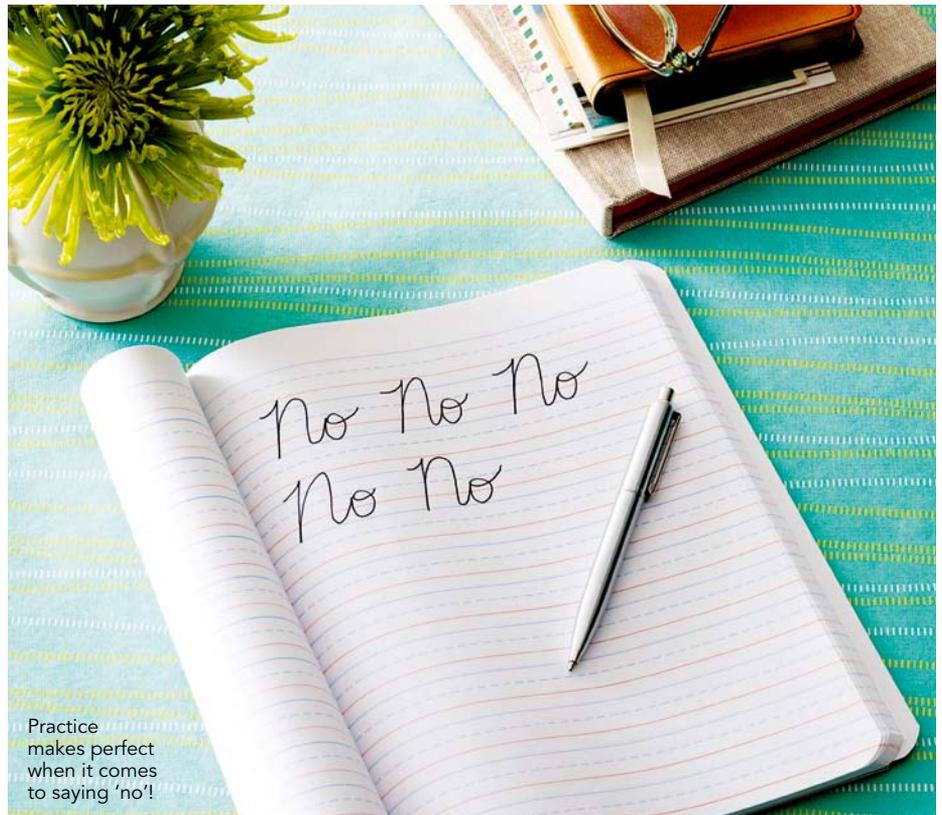
Dawn is a writer and TV presenter. She lives in London with her husband, actor Chris O'Dowd, her dog Potato and her Siamese cat Lilu. She is happiest with her cat on her lap, eating crisps.

“ Some time ago, I was standing in my bedroom with a man I didn't know who wanted to clean my windows. He had knocked on my door, insisted my windows were unthinkable and followed me upstairs. Once in my bedroom, I realised I didn't want to have my windows cleaned so I said I'd changed my mind. But what was ridiculous was that he was there in the first place. Why was it that I so often said 'yes' when what I meant to say was 'no'?

My need to please has been exhausting: I have gone to places I didn't want to go and said things I didn't want to say, all to please whoever I was with at the time. I'm sure it stems from being taken in by my aunty and uncle at age 10 after I lost my mother to cancer, which meant I subconsciously thought I must be grateful and set my own needs aside to keep everyone else happy. Annoyingly, I carried this trait into adulthood. In my early career as a presenter, I was filming a TV show and didn't stand my ground on something they asked me to say. And now, somewhere out there (i.e. all over YouTube), there is a recording of me saying the words, 'My name is Dawn Porter, and I get quite a lot of sex'. It's so excruciating, it brings tears to my eyes. What annoys me is that I didn't say no at the time – a common theme for most of my life. That is, until now.

My light-bulb moment came recently, a result of observing the people around me. Because of the work I do in TV, some

“ I'VE FINALLY LEARNT NOT TO BE A 'YES' PERSON FOR THE SAKE OF IT AND I'M A LOT HAPPIER ”



Practice makes perfect when it comes to saying 'no'!

people feel they need to please me and do what I ask and I realised how uncomfortable this makes me feel. I like honest people who treat me on a level. So why was I behaving in the exact opposite way myself?

My journey into the land of NO has been further inspired by my husband. He never says yes when he means no. This doesn't make him mean – it makes him sincere, attentive to the things he says yes to and, crucially, happy. He always encourages me to 'just say no' when stewing over yet another uncomfortable situation, either in my career, with a friend, or with a window cleaner waving his squeegee at me in my bedroom.

Unfortunately for him, I say no a lot more to him these days too. I certainly don't pretend it's fine when he is

watching the football and I want to watch *Come Dine With Me*, and I don't say, 'No dear, you never steal the covers' because HE DOES.

I used to think if I treated people the way I'd like to be treated it would eventually come back positively to me, but it doesn't mean that at all. What it means is that people take advantage of you, or make you say stupid things about how much sex you have, or keep you from meeting work deadlines while offloading every detail of their lives but never thinking to ask how *you* are doing.

What I have learned is that you should treat people according to how they treat you, stand your ground at work, ensure your relationships are equal, not be a yes person for the sake of it and take pride in saying no. Has this new attitude made my life easier and happier? Unequivocally, yes. Was I really getting lots of sex at the time of that voice over? Unfortunately, no.” ♦