



WORDS TO LEAVE BY

There are five fundamental declarations that drive most of human interaction:

- No
- Yes
- Thank you
- I'm sorry
- I don't know.

These declarations are key to affecting a well-executed exit from a work situation. By effective, I mean an exit that ensures the dignity of the person leaving and those being left behind, allowing the work to continue without disruption. I also mean an exit in which there is little or no “emotional wake” because people are complete with one another. It doesn't mean no sadness, just no unfinished business. Let's look at each declaration more closely.

No. Part of an effective leave-taking is: knowing what you're saying *no* to. This isn't a matter of bad-mouthing other people or complaining about the situation. It's being so clear in your own mind about what you are saying *no* to that you send zero mixed signals of any kind, nothing that would lead people to believe you are confused or uncertain about the move you are making.

Yes. Here's an interesting conundrum: if you can't say *no*, then you can't really say *yes* and have it be a meaningful commitment. Once you know what you're saying *no* to, then you can start to get clear about what you're also saying *yes* to, what draws you forward. Again, this may not be some-

thing you discuss much with colleagues in your leave-taking process. However, it is critically important that it be clear in your own mind where you're headed – what you intend to say *yes* to once you are free to do so.

Thank you. What gratitude do you need to express, and to whom, in order to take your leave with grace? Who helped you along the way, who supported you (even if they didn't know they were doing so)? Who have been your champions? Who labored long and hard because they believed in you? Those are all people who deserve a personal, written *thank you* before you depart. Be sure to be specific: “thanks, you were a big help” is nowhere near as meaningful or useful as “I really appreciated the care, thought and attention you put into running the meetings on the XXX project. We always started on time and ended on time and everyone knew what they were supposed to do next.”

I'm sorry. For closure to be complete, to whom do you owe an apology? It could be either for sins of commission or omission: “I'm sorry I've been so short with you the last few weeks as I sorted out my decision to leave. Will you forgive me?” or “I'm sorry that I failed to follow up on your request for more heads on this project back in January; I should have done better. Will you forgive me?”

I don't know. Every new beginning requires an ending and then a period of uncertainty. Are you comfortable inside yourself with all the things you don't know as you're leaving and can't know for some time to come? Make a list of those things and review it tenderly, watching your own emotional reactions so that you know where your fears lie. The more aware of

those fears you are – and the more observant of them – the less they can control you, sneak up on you or flatten you with sheer terror.

Use the rest of this page as a worksheet to figure out what work you have to do around each of the declarations in order to leave with grace and dignity.

| Declaration | Person(s) you need to say it to: | Action you need to take: |
|---------------------|---|---------------------------------|
| <i>No</i> | | |
| <i>Yes</i> | | |
| <i>Thank you</i> | | |
| <i>I'm sorry</i> | | |
| <i>I don't know</i> | | |