

What to do about the “no response” response

We're all familiar with the “no response” response, right? That's the response that we don't actually get but that in effect means no.

It happens with all sorts of queries and in all communication modes. Perhaps you sent a text message asking your friend if he wants to go to the movies, and you don't hear back. Perhaps you sent an email inquiring about a job, and all you got in response was nothing. Maybe you are old school, and left a colleague a voice mail message, and she never called back.

Since this “no response” has become the *de facto* “no” response, we've come to assume if we haven't heard from somebody that he or she is not interested in what we are offering, or proposing, or asking about. But, this assumption can be problematic.

No more follow ups

Sometimes (not many times but still it happens) people genuinely did not get your message. The email ended up in the spam folder or the voice message got inadvertently deleted. But because you've become used to not expecting an answer unless the person is interested, you've stopped following up. And you and the recipient may miss out on a potential opportunity.

Too many follow ups

And then there are people who don't give up until they get an answer. They may be clueless or they may be aggressive or both. When they don't hear back from you, they keep getting in touch. They keep calling and texting and emailing. They don't get that your lack of response means no and it also means

“please stop getting in touch, I don’t want to deal with you!”

It’s just plain lazy

By assuming that everybody understands that no response means you aren’t interested, in effect, you are taking the lazy (and rude) approach. Why bother answering an email with a polite “thank you but not interested” response when it is much easier to just ignore and delete?

It may make you look bad

You may think that not responding communicates that you are too/so busy. You may actually be coming off as self-important or uncaring.

What to do?

We’ve all been on either side of the “no response” response. Sometimes, we get overwhelmed and we forget to respond. And sometimes we sit around waiting for a response that never comes. What, if anything, can we do about it?

If you get the “no response” response: Accept that you can’t control what other people do. You don’t know their motivations or reasoning. So, don’t automatically assume a “no response” equals no unless you really know the person and his/her *modus operandi*. Do follow up once, but probably no more than that. If again, you don’t get a response, let it go. Remember, you can only try to get in touch but you can’t force an interaction.

If you are avoiding responding: Become aware of the messages you are sending when you don’t respond. Is it that you can’t or don’t want to say no? Why is that? Are you not responding because you are overwhelmed? If so, perhaps you need to see about reducing your workload. Perhaps you do it because you don’t like confrontation. If so, ask yourself what you think will happen.

What are your thoughts? What do you think when someone fails to respond to you? Or are you the one failing to respond?