

“I Am NOT Open to Opportunity!”

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In 2017, I will start my **21st year** in executive search. In my more than two decades of working as a search consultant “in the trenches,” I have literally spoken with thousands of professionals. As you might expect, I have learned quite a few things during that time.

One of the many things I’ve learned is that there are **two kinds** of people. Those people can be placed in the following categories:

1. Those who are OPEN to opportunity.
2. Those who are NOT open to opportunity.

Before we go any further, allow me to share something else that I’ve learned during the past two decades:

Those people who are open to opportunity are typically **more successful** in their careers than those who are not open to opportunity.

Now, that’s not always the case, but it is the case in the vast majority of instances. But what about those who are NOT open to opportunity? What happens to them?

A case study in “opportunity lost”

When I talk to professionals, one of the first questions I ask is, “*Are you open to hearing about another opportunity at this time?*” Unfortunately, some people are not open. In fact, some are closed and say “No” before they even know what they’re declining.

I have a **case study** regarding just such a situation that happened recently.

I called someone to let him know about an opportunity, but before I could even tell him what the opportunity was, he said, “*I am not open to the opportunity.*” Now, why would he say that before he even knew what the opportunity was? How did he even know what he was saying “No” to?

In this particular instance, I knew the person involved. I had observed his career for about 10 years. As a result, I knew that the opportunity I was presenting was of a higher level than the position he currently held. I also knew that the opportunity was with the one of the top employers within the industry.

This was all good information. However, I was not able to communicate this information to the person. This individual didn’t know what the position was, what company it was with, or anything else about it. All he knew was that I was calling about an opportunity and that he was not interested in hearing about it.

I do believe this, however: I believe that if he had listened to what the opportunity was, **he might have been interested**. It was a more prestigious role with a more prestigious company. What part of that is not interesting?

“What kind of opportunity do you have?”

One of the most successful people I know within the industry in which I recruit told me that early in his career, his mentor instructed him countless times to never say “No” to an opportunity without first **knowing** about the opportunity. His mentor told him to always be open to at least hearing about the opportunity and that it costs you *nothing to listen*.

So that brings me back to those people I’ve encountered who are open. When I ask the question, “*Are you open to hearing about another opportunity at this time?*” they usually say one of **two things**:

1. “Yes, I’m open to hearing about it.”
2. “Yes, what kind of opportunity do you have?” or “Tell me about this opportunity.”

All these people are agreeing to is hearing what the opportunity is and then deciding whether or not they are interested. What they are NOT doing is committing themselves to the opportunity. They are also NOT saying, “*Yes, I will resign from my current company and leave tomorrow to take another position.*”

What they're really doing is creating **options** for themselves. More options are good, and you are free to choose whichever option is best for you. Basically, these individuals have created the following options for themselves:

- They can listen to the opportunity and decide that they do **not** want to move forward.
- They can listen to the opportunity and decide that they **do** want to move forward.

If they choose option #2, then they still have options from which to choose:

- They can later decide that they're no longer interested in the opportunity if they believe it's not better than the position they have now.
- They can later decide that they're still interested in the opportunity if they believe that is in fact better than the position they have now.

The bottom line: people who are open to hearing about a new opportunity give themselves more options, and as a result, enjoy **more success** in their careers.

Comfort = complacency, not success

Unfortunately, our human brains have been programmed over the years to say "No" sometimes due to a fear of change. However, how is that helpful for those who are hoping to enhance their career? It's not helpful!

There is actually scientific evidence to back this up. In 2015, the [results of a study](#) were published in PLoS Computational Biology. The study revealed that human beings are more likely to say "No" than "Yes" for biological reasons tied to how the brain functions. "It could be that humans are wired to be natural naysayers," said Arvind Kumar, senior author of the study.

Below is an excerpt from the book *Just Enough Anxiety: the Hidden Driver of Business Success* by Robert H. Rosen:

Many scientists and change experts say we're engineered biologically, socially, and psychologically to seek homeostasis. We search for security. We prefer order. We long for predictability and stability in our lives. These conditions, we've come to believe, are the signs that we have "arrived." We equate comfort with success.

Here's the problem. I've learned something else during my two decades in executive search. I've learned that **comfort does not equal success**. Instead, comfort can easily lead to *complacency*, and complacency most definitely does not equal success.

You could very well say that the human brain is "wired" for the illusion of stability and comfort. With that illusion comes complacency and a desire for the status quo. This is rarely, if ever, the recipe for career advancement and satisfaction.

Overcome your biological wiring and at least be open to hearing about a new opportunity. Get all of the facts and information and then make a decision about whether or not you want to move

forward. Just taking that one step will put you in the category of people who are overall more successful in their career.

So the next time opportunity comes knocking on your door, will you say, “*Yes, I’m open to opportunity*” . . . or will you say, “*No, I’m closed to opportunity*”?

Your decision could very well impact both the rest of your career and the rest of your life. It’s better to have options and to put yourself in the driver’s seat.

Besides, the best time to strategically advance your career forward is when you have a **good job now**. That way, you can listen to opportunity and make a move *only* for a better opportunity than the one you have now. The worst time to make a move is when you find out that your position has been eliminated. In such a situation, you have no leverage and are desperate to find something quickly.

Unfortunately for some people, that is the only time they are open to opportunity. Don’t be that person!