

Oui, Si, Ja, Verdadeiramente, Da and Yes, Yes, Yes

Just say no.

You've heard it before. This phrase, concocted for television ads in the 1980s and 1990s, was intended to help kids refrain from engaging in recreational drug use. Part of the national "War on Drugs," it spilled over into campaigns against violence, premarital sex, and other teen vices.

Can you name the number one voice that began the chant?

Nancy Reagan is heralded as the slogan creator and champion.

So let me be not the first to contradict her. I want to suggest we say yes. Yes to whatever is.

Of course, many folks have contradicted her. In deed. For instance, some of her most prominent spokespeople. When the ad first came out, it was incorporated into popular shows of the day such as *Different Strokes* and *Punky Brewster*. The irony? Many of the child stars involved in the campaign, such as [Drew Barrymore](#), [Corey Haim](#) and [Corey Feldman](#) (and [John Alford](#) from *Grange Hill*), were at the time or later illegal drug users.

But I am not talking about drugs here, at least not in specific. I am talking about life in general. Every day we say no to so many things. No to our feelings, because they are uncomfortable. No to our anger, no to our passion, no to our desire, no to our unrealistic dreams.

Have I told you before about my favorite story game, *Yes, And?* Here's how we play. You need two people. The first says a statement. For instance, "Once upon a time there was a woman." The next player says, "Yes, and she was _____," filling in the blank with whatever comes to mind. Player number one responds, "Yes, and ..." The two players continue to tell a story, volleying the action back and forth, each time beginning their turn with the words "yes, and."

It's a popular theater game, but it serves us well in life. If we confront each real situation with these two words—*yes, and*—then we are better able to propel ourselves forward. The word yes is the only word that makes sense. It acknowledges that what is *is* what is. It looks reality right in the face. Yes, my kid is on drugs. Yes, my marriage is failing. Yes, my job is tenuous. Yes, I have no money. Yes, I have cancer. Yes is not a threat. It is a willingness to see the world with all its warts and difficulties.

The secret to dealing with the consequences of yes is the next word: *and*. Of all the magic words, *and* likely takes the cake. Somehow, we Americans like to get caught in dualities. We embrace an "or" based world. Things are either black *or* white. They are right *or* wrong. We are rich *or* poor. Things are good *or* bad.

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Word Woman

What if, next time you hear yourself (or someone else) say “or” you try replacing the conjunction with “and.” Because *and* is the way the world really works. Things are black *and* white. An action might be right *and* wrong. Things might be good *and* bad at the same time. The world is full of wishy washy gray.

When we say *and*, we are leading ourselves into whatever comes next—be it rehab, reconciliation, divorce, parenthood, or a meal full of saturated fat and all its consequences.

Because really, when faced with gray, what can we say but [absolutely](#), [agreed](#), [all right](#), [assuredly](#), [aye](#), [gladly](#), [indubitably](#), [roger](#), [undoubtedly](#), [unquestionably](#), [willingly](#), [yea](#), [OK](#), [uh-huh](#), [yeah](#), [yep](#) and [right on](#).

In a word, *yes*. My most recent CD of poetry, *Suitcase of Yeses*, is based on the idea that if we want to walk more joyfully through life, we might as well say yes to it all. Yes to war, because war is. Yes to death, because death is. Yes to suffering, because it is. And once we acknowledge it, say yes to it, THEN we can deal with it. And what comes next.

Just say no? At our own peril. Just say yes. And.

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