Navigating Non-Promotable Tasks in the Workplace
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A non-promotable task matters to your organization but will not help your career.
The No Club’s Top 10 NPTs

- Helping others and filling in
- Organizing and coordinating the work of others
- Editing, proofreading, and compiling the work of others
- Logistical planning and special events
- Committees, committees, committees
- Recruiting
- Onboarding, training, and mentoring
- Helping coworkers with their personal problems
- Resolving conflict among coworkers
- Office housework: getting coffee, cleaning up, taking notes...
Identifying whether a task is promotable

Is the task **instrumental** to improving the organization’s bottom line?

Is your performance on the task **visible** to others?

Does the task **require specialized skills** to perform, or can anyone do it?

**Indirectly Promotable:** Does the task let you develop useful skills or relationships that could lead to promotable tasks in the future? *(Beware!)*
Women do more NPTs than Men: Evidence from 3000 Engineers

As compared to my colleagues with a comparable role, seniority, and experience...

- I am more likely assigned to high-profile tasks or work teams.
- I have had the same access to desirable assignments as my colleagues.
- I often do more housework—finding a time everyone can meet, taking notes at a meeting, planning office parties, etc.

Women do more NPTs than Men: Evidence from a Consulting Firm
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Regardless of seniority, the median woman worked 200 more hours per year on non-promotable tasks than their male colleagues.
Women do more NPTs than Men: Evidence from a Consulting Firm

At the same time, the median junior woman worked 250 fewer hours on promotable tasks than their male colleagues.
Women do more NPTs than Men: Evidence from a Consulting Firm

The median senior woman worked 250 more total hours to make room for her excessive load of non-promotable work.

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Median Hours Per Year
Work-Work Imbalance
Harms Women and Their Careers

- Career stagnation
- Loss of confidence
- Job dissatisfaction and turnover
Work Overload
Harms Women and Their Careers

- Work/Family imbalance
- Stress, burnout
- Withdrawal, resignation
Overburdening Women with NPTs Harms Organizations

Ineffective use of talent pool
Lost performance, productivity
Culture of Inequity
Loss of talent
How do women end up doing the bulk of NPTS?

They are asked

They say yes

They volunteer
Who will write up the report?

Example: An employee review committee
Research Study

Gender and Volunteering to do an NPT

A woman is 50% more likely to volunteer than a man.

Why do women volunteer more?

Groups of only men and groups of only women volunteer at the same rate. Women volunteer more because we expect them to.

Who is asked?

A woman is asked 44% more than a man

Male and female managers ask women more

Women 50% more likely to say yes

Hey you - please volunteer?

How do women end up doing the bulk of NPTS?

They are asked

They say yes

They volunteer

...because they’re expected to
Why do we ask Women to do NPTs?

I ask people I expect will say yes

When I think about who is a “good fit” for NPTs, women come to mind more easily

It’s easier to ask someone who has done it before

I need a female representative

I was just trying to help them
Individual Solutions: Strategies for Balancing Workload
Before saying “yes” or volunteering

- Get the information you need to understand the task
- Consider who is asking you
- Don’t underestimate the cost of saying “yes”
- Don’t get cornered into saying “yes”
- Remember the future you
- Beware of your triggers
- Ignore the Diva moment
- Consider your implicit “no”
Saying No
Avoiding negative repercussions

- Offer an alternative that solves their problem
- Put conditions on your yes
- Turn a request for help into a negotiation
Right-size your NPT Load
(aka optimize your work portfolio)

Assess
How do you spend your time?
How do others spend their time?
What does your organization expect?
How do you want to spend your time?

Adjust
What can you let go?
Who can take it on?
Who will help you make the change?
Choose NPTs that are right for you

- NPTs that fulfill you
- NPTs that leverage your expertise
- NPTs that provide a good return on your time spent
- NPTs that give you a mental break
- NPTs that fit with your current assignments
Fixing the Problem
How Individuals Can Seed Change

**CREATE AWARENESS**

Present the issue in relatable terms

Tie the issue to important organizational goals and values

Identify and mobilize your allies

**TAKE ACTION**

Recommend new ways of allocating tasks

Interject before a woman is voluntold

Mentor early career colleagues
How Managers Can Fix the Problem

CHANGE HOW NPTS ARE DISTRIBUTED
- Random assignment
- Taking turns
- Assign tasks strategically

REASSIGN AND REDISTRIBUTE CURRENT NPTS
To optimally leverage specialized skill sets

INCREASE THE TALENT POOL
- Identify more people who can do NPTs
- Train new people to do NPTs

EDUCATE YOUR EMPLOYEES
- On the promotability of various tasks
- How to balance their work portfolio

AVOID CULTURAL TAXATION
- Don’t overburden members of underrepresented groups
How Organizations Can Fix the Problem

- Set expectations and enforce standards for doing NPTs
- Provide incentives for doing NPTs
- Redesign jobs so that NPTs for one role become PTs for another
- Reconsider what is and is not promotable
Benefits to Organizations that Fix the Problem

- More efficient workforce utilization
- A more equitable and supportive culture
- Retention of valuable employees
- A more engaged and satisfied workforce
- Greater ability to attract the best talent
Discussion Questions

• Are you overburdened with non-promotable tasks? What types of NPTs typically end up on your plate?
• Are women in your organization doing more NPTs than male colleagues? Where are the differences most evident?
• Do you have a difficult time saying “no”? What are the risks and benefits if you did so?
• What can you do to fix the problem in your department or organization?
• What is your main take-away from the presentation? Next steps?
Join
The No Club!

Available via all major booksellers

"Valuable tips for changing the status quo [and] sound guidance for sparking change in organizations."
—Kirkus Reviews

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