

ASK FOR WHAT YOU WANT

Often we do not get results until we ask for something. Self-responsible human beings are “request machines.” They know that one way to get what they want is to ask for it.

A request assumes that something is missing. Perhaps a task needs to be completed, a message needs to be delivered, an item needs to be found, or a solution needs to be discovered. If nothing is missing, if everything is complete, and if there are no problems, then requests are not needed.

A request also assumes that the person on the receiving end of the request has the ability to grant it. For example, we would be foolish to ask a lawyer to perform open heart surgery, or to ask a two-year-old to write a term paper.

Desire is like the flu—it’s contagious. When you make a skillful request for what you want, other people can “catch” your desire. When that happens, they’re often happy to grant your request.

When you ask for what you want, you also model a powerful strategy. By setting an effective example, you invite others to ask for what *they* want.

Include timelines

When appropriate, include a specific due date in your request: “Will you please deliver the report to me by 4 p.m. tomorrow?” Misunderstandings, hard feelings, and missed opportunities can be avoided when people agree on the timeline.

Look for effective responses

There are five effective responses to a request.

The first two are contained in a simple *yes* or *no*. In this case, others either grant the request or they do not. When they grant your request, they in effect promise that they will fulfill it to your conditions of satisfaction.

A third type of response is a *counteroffer*. They could commit to fulfilling part but not all of your request: “I will deliver the report to you tomorrow, but I am not willing to deliver it by a specific time.” With this information, you can



choose to accept the modified outcome, negotiate another outcome, or stick with your original request.

If others are not clear about what you're requesting, they can use a fourth response and ask questions for *clarification*. For example, does delivering the report mean including a backup copy on computer disk?

A fifth effective response to a request is to *postpone* a response. Perhaps others need to check on the status of some other project before they know if they can fulfill your request. Maybe others just want to consider your request for a day or two before they answer. If so, ask when they can give you their response.

Notice that answering with "maybe" is not included in this list of effective responses. If someone responds to your request with "maybe," then consider asking someone else.

Ask cleanly and clearly

Most of us have grown up in a culture in which we're not supposed to feel proud about asking for what we want. Some people even have a habit of apologizing when doing so: "I'm sorry to bring this up, but would you mind not smoking while we're together? Of course, if you want to keep smoking, that's probably OK."

When we hedge a request like this, we clutter our message. Others may not understand what we're asking.

Another option is to trust your desires and make requests without qualification or apology. When you're proud of what you want, then you can ask cleanly and clearly. Compare the following two requests:

- "I was kinda thinking I might like to eat Vietnamese food tonight but I don't know for sure. You might like something different."
- "I want to go out to dinner at a Vietnamese restaurant. I'd like you to come along. How about it?"

It's easy for people to be on the receiving end of the second request. And many will find it easier to say yes.





Make authentic requests

Requests differ from demands. When we make an authentic request and it is declined, we can accept the refusal without becoming depressed, frustrated, or angry.

If we make a request of someone and react strongly when that person says no, then we didn't make a request. We made a demand. We're more likely to get what we want when we soften demands into requests.

Keep asking

Some people have a habit of making a request only when they're 99 percent sure that they'll get a yes in response. These people are cautious. They protect themselves against no's.

Another way to respond to a no is to ask again later, or to ask someone else for what you want. By making many requests of many people, you stand to get at least as many yes's as no's.

People might say no before they've fully understood or considered your request. Give them another chance. Keep asking with polite persistence.

Say thanks

Something wonderful happens when we make requests. Many of them get fulfilled. Often we end up creating the life of our dreams.

When that happens, say thanks. Share your joy and offer your gratitude when others grant your requests. Saying thanks or writing a thank-you note acknowledges the role that other people play in your success.

Giving thanks also reminds us that we live in a world where it's possible to determine what we want in life—and get it.



Climb the ladder of powerful speaking

Think of a problem in your life or something that you would like to change. On a separate sheet of paper, write about how you could describe this situation while “standing” on each rung of the ladder of powerful speaking.

Afterward, choose which rung is most comfortable for you.

Next, even if you feel some discomfort, move up the ladder to a higher rung. Practice speaking at this new level to a family member, friend, or someone directly affected by the problem.

For example, you might look at an unfinished project at work and say, “I can’t finish projects on time because my boss sets totally unreasonable timelines.” That’s a case of dwelling on the rung of obligation. An alternative is to move up to the rung of possibility: “Instead of agreeing to the first schedule my boss proposes, I could lobby for extra time.” You might even feel comfortable standing on this rung for a while.

