



Asking? Just Do It!

Dichotomy: a division into two mutually exclusive, opposed, or contradictory groups: a dichotomy between words and actions.

"Do as I say, not as I do" or "It's better to give than receive."



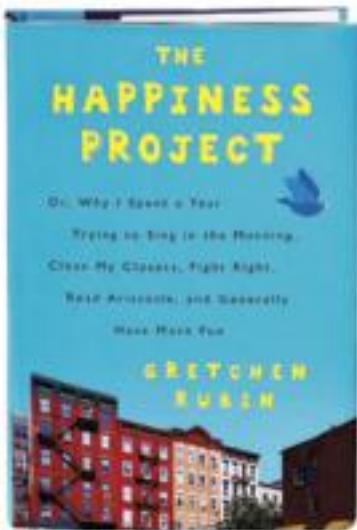
[1]There seems to be a dichotomy when we think about asking for help.

Asking seems to be difficult, while giving when asked seems all too easy. In fact, research shows that those who "help others" feel better about themselves and have better health. But to give help to someone, they have to receive it, so there's another rub (or dichotomy). **How do we know what to give if others are having trouble asking?** Or what if their way of asking doesn't give us enough direction on what to offer?

To unpack why few of us want to ask for help, we turned to the work of Marci Alboher. In [Working the New Economy](#) [2], Alboher suggests a few reasons: we fear rejection, being seen as needy, weak, or playing on the goodness of others. Just the thought of asking for help can make us feel uncomfortable or sheepish.

Couple this with the fact that "those who are approached for help are under social pressure to be benevolent. Just saying no can make them look very bad - to themselves and others." So that's why we often get overextended when we say yes to too many requests for help. **But can we get better at resolving the dichotomy, by learning both how to ask clearly, to say yes when we actually want to and can, and to balance our needs to give with a very real need to receive (for which we need to ask).**

Here are reasons and reinforcement for asking. In "[If You Need Help, Just Ask: Understanding Compliance with Direct Requests for Help](#)," research conducted by Francis J. Flynn and Vanessa K.B. Lake, found that those asking for help believed it was more likely that they would receive help if they were indirect about it - communicating their requests with a look, rather than a direct question. This is not correct! In fact, **people in the position of offering assistance said they were much more likely to help if asked point blank.** "People are more willing to help than you think, and that can be important to know when you're trying to get the resources you need to get a job done, when you're trying to solicit funds, or what have you." So, let's test their work by **learning to ask clearly and directly. Maybe, like with math problems, practice will help. But why?**



[3]Gretchen Rubin's work, [The Happiness Project](#) [4] is an account of the year she spent test-driving studies and theories about how to be happier. **She decided to start asking for help, and good things happened as a result of it. She got smart advice. She got support from others. She made many people feel good by respecting them enough to seek their counsel. This matches other research showing that people who help others are happier and healthier.**

Rubin says, "Every day I get at least one email or call asking for help with something -- a request for an introduction, a recommendation, advice on how to find a job. Some of these requests are easy to answer, and in those cases, I respond quickly, either by doing the thing requested of me or explaining why I can't. Others leave me frustrated with the questioner. And when I'm frustrated it's usually for a variation of the same few reasons. **The person didn't ask a proper question; the person didn't appear to have done any work to solve the problem on her own; or she was coming to me for something that I wasn't really in a position to help with.**"

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