



The (Lost) Art of Asking for Help

* *PSN Editor's Note*: When asking for help, a “no” most frequently says something about the folks who are saying it rather than about the person who has asked for help. Remember that – first and foremost!



[1]In the preface to her book *Mayday! Asking for Help in Times of Need* (Berrett-Koehler, 2007), M. Nora Klaver, a Chicago-based master coach, explains: “It comes from the French *m’aidez* (pronounced much like the English word *mayday*) and literally translates to ‘help me.’” Unfortunately for many, asking for help translates into a mayday call for help that is not made at all, or only made when there is almost no other choice.

But the good news is that you can learn to ask for help, says Klaver. In fact, it can be a fairly simple act. But first, you’ve got to debunk some common cultural myths.

For example:

Myth: Asking for help makes you look weak or needy.

Reality: There’s no shame in turning to others in true times of need. In fact, it’s a sign of strength.

Myth: Asking for help signals incompetence—especially at work.

Reality: Seeking help at work shows others that you want to do the job right—and to develop and learn.

Myth: Asking for help can harm relationships.

Reality: Healthy relationships are about give and take—not just give.

Myth: Asking for help puts others in an awkward position.

Reality: It’s human nature to offer help when you see someone in need—and it’s no different when others see you in need.

Myth: Asking for help might lead to rejection.

Reality: Even a “no” response offers the opportunity to learn more about yourself—and your relationships.

Myth: Asking for help means the task or job might not get done right.

Reality: Refusing to ask for fear of losing control maintains the status quo. Let go and give your helpmate a chance to shine.

Myth: Asking for help means you’ll have to return the favor.

Reality: Help freely given comes with no strings attached—other than a simple and sincere thank-you.



Myth: Asking for help just isn't the American way.

Reality: Independence and self-sufficiency are admirable qualities that lead to success. Still, all great enterprises—including our nation—were built on support, teamwork, and collaboration.

In her book, Klaver lists some of the reasons why people often delay a valid request for help until they have reached the point of desperation. She writes:

- We may ask too late because we don't recognize early enough that we actually have a need to be filled.
- We may not see the whole picture, so the help we ask for satisfied only part of our need.
- We may ask the wrong person or people to help us with our request.
- Our requests may be so unclear that others may not understand that we need help at all.
- Help may come, but because we weren't clear enough in our requests, it's the wrong help.
- We may demand assistance rather than politely ask for it.
- We may resort to blackmail, bribery, or even coercion to get our needs met.
- We may inadvertently solicit pity instead of help.
- We may ask for help too often without concern for our friends, family, and coworkers. Compassion fatigue becomes a real possibility for them.
- We may simply frighten ourselves into never asking.

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