



Ask for Help

We don't think of the things we say and do in terms of skills, we just say or do them. But most everything we say and do involve skill sets. Asking for help requires numerous skills if we expect a good result.... Maximizing the chance for the person we ask for help to be willing and agreeable. They will respond more favorably because we chose them thoughtfully, trusted them; spoke clearly about our need; explained the problem and our desired solution -- and because they work well in a team. Trust, speaking and problem solving are skills. Our success in building a PSN that works well for us and for those helping us is enhanced by -- even dependent upon -- how well we use these skills. Here are some helpful guidelines with the skills you'll want to use when asking for help.

Emotion Management or Control

About Emotions: When asking for help, emotions can help or hurt. If we pay attention to our emotions, we will discover how they can work for us or against us. When our emotions are heightened, when we're overly anxious, stressed out or excited, our ability to think, to use logic is hijacked. If asked: "What were you thinking?" and we reply with: "I don't know, I wasn't thinking" - we are right! Our brains don't function; we don't think when our emotions are heightened or out of control. Asking for help requires us to think. If we expect and want good outcomes, we must learn to manage or control our emotions.

4 Simple Steps to Managing Emotions

1. Stop: As soon as we notice that our emotions begin to rise, stop talking.
2. Chill out: think of something or do something that will bring a feeling of calm.
3. Think it through now that our emotions are under control.
4. Talk it through with a trusted family member, friend, or resource.
5. Reconnect with the person we are asking to help us when it is safe to do so.

Mistakes to Avoid

1. Feeling entitled to help
2. Whining when asking.
3. Being Inconsiderate of helper's needs.
4. Failing to explain fully and clearly our needs and expectations.
5. Allowing uncontrolled emotions to cause unnecessary conflicts.
6. Allowing fears and anxieties to prevent us from reaching out and asking for help.

Problem Solving and Decision Making

About these skills: Good problem solving and good decision making require us to think. First think about how we want the solution or decision to turn out - a vision of what would be OUR successful outcome. Then, go back to the beginning to figure out people, organizations or professionals we need to include and things we have to do to help our ideal outcome a reality.

Problem Solving

1. Identify the real problem to be solved and be specific about the tasks and help you need. If this is difficult, then asking for help in doing this is our first step. Brainstorming with a trusted other can be valuable!
2. Make sure the right persons are being asked to help and give these persons the necessary information about the task. Let them know our vision and desired outcomes -- help them be part of the solution to the problem.



3. Let these persons know what you expect/hope will happen if/when they run into a problem with the task.
4. Build in back-up plans if the person committed to helping, at the last minute, is unable to help. Plan in advance for a way in which they, too, can reach out for help.

Decision Making

1. Identify the decision that is needed to make and what outcome is wanted.
2. List the steps needed to have the decision or choices turn out well.
3. Consider the worst that can happen if a decision or choice fails to turn out the way intended. Think about how a team might deal with it if it doesn't work out.
4. Consult with trusted family or friends or advisors if the decision is important to you and to those you love and care about. Seek their input – ask for their help in figuring out what might be the best decision for you.

Mistakes to Avoid: Problem Solving and Decision Making

1. Solving the wrong problem or making the wrong decision – inevitably there will be times when wrong turns are taken. Be easy on yourself & recalibrate.
2. Failing to consider how the solution or decision will affect others.
3. Neglecting to think the solution or decision through and ending up with unwanted results. There ALWAYS are unintended consequences. With planning and support we roll better with the punches and bounce back with alternatives and good humor.
4. Beating ourselves up instead of looking at what we can do differently in the future.
5. Failing to fix a problem or decision that is not working, quickly.
6. Asking people to help with tasks they can't or don't do well. Remember, an "ASK" is only an "ask" when "no" is an acceptable response. Allow for this and avoid making others feel guilty for things they can't or don't want to do.
7. Allowing fears and anxieties around rejection to interfere with asking for help.
8. Believing you don't matter and not asking – not allowing others to help. Remember, we all need to matter to others – so offer the opportunity.
9. Assuming it's all about you when someone says 'no', they can't help you solve a problem or are unwilling to help you talk through a decision you need to make.
10. Seeking help from those whom have consistently demonstrated that they don't follow through, cause more problems and make poor choices/decisions. Remember to say thank you, and move on.
11. Overloading people with tasks – asking too much of too few.
12. Forgetting to express gratitude and appreciation for the help we receive - even when someone declines.

Trusting and Being Trustworthy

Have we ever heard "I don't know who to trust anymore"? Many of us have thought it or stated it. Or, have we felt the let down from placing trust in the wrong people? Most of us have. Being trustworthy is as important as placing trust in others. Here are some simple steps to practice when placing trust in others.

The four zones of trust: 1. Has demonstrated total trustworthiness. 2. Has demonstrated trust in some areas but not all. 3. Neutral zone – We don't know yet because not enough time has passed to observe pattern of behavior. 4. Has demonstrated untrustworthiness in areas that are important to us - no trust in this zone at all.

Even VERY trustworthy people will occasionally fail to follow through or disappoint us. Over time it's the balance that is important.

Steps to Establish Trust

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1. Think about what trust means in a relationship with this person. What do you want to trust this person with or for?
2. Observe patterns of behavior over time to decide if this person is trustworthy with issues or things that are important.
3. Allow enough time to pass in the relationship before moving from a neutral zone into one of the two trust zones.
4. Let the person know what trust means to you in all aspects of the task.
5. Demonstrate your own trustworthiness.

Mistakes to Avoid

1. Confusing nice with trustworthy.
2. Trusting people who have demonstrated they are untrustworthy to follow through as promised.
3. Failing to demonstrate trustworthiness for others.
4. Ignoring patterns of untrustworthiness, no trust.
5. Expecting others to be trustworthy in all things.

Listen to Understand and Speak to be Understood

About Listening and Speaking: Effective listening and speaking are skills that require us to use our emotional control skills. When our emotions elevate, we miss parts of what is said and speak without thinking it through. To determine if you heard what the speaker intended you to hear, always repeat and ask if what you heard was what they meant. When speaking, listen to yourself to make sure you said what you wanted to say and the listener has all they need to know to help you and minimize surprises. Try asking the person with whom you are speaking to tell you what they heard and be patient with "correcting". We all have our own filters and occasionally tune out others. Remember your goal: understanding.

Steps for Listening and Speaking

1. Listen with intent to hear speaker's intention.
2. Demonstrate respect and interest in the speaker and what is being said.
3. Stay focused on the speaker until he/she is finished talking.
4. Apologize if you interrupt before the speaker has finished.
5. Ask questions to ensure that you understand what was said.
6. Stay focused. Avoid appearing bored or disinterested.

Speaking

1. Words have meaning. Do you really mean a few minutes' time or a few hours?
2. Think about what you want to say and how you want to say it.
3. Speak to be understood and be specific when asking for help.
4. Know what you want to achieve by speaking and confirm with the listener that you have been understood, accurately.

Mistakes to Avoid

1. Assuming without asking for clarification.
2. Speaking too fast.
3. Leaving out important information and facts or misleading.
4. Using words that do not reflect what you mean.
5. Allowing emotions to get out of control.



Organization, Planning, Prioritizing & Vision

About organization, planning, prioritizing and vision: Some people are very organized while many are not. If you are not skilled in organizing, planning and prioritizing, ask for help from someone who is skilled. It's important to value your helper's time and willingness to help. Having a well thought out plan and prioritizing prevents conflicts and disappointments. Also having a vision of what the end result should be or look like helps the team work toward that goal.

Steps for Organizing, Planning, Prioritizing & Vision

1. First think about what it is that needs to be achieved – the perfect ending or vision.
2. Make a list of all the tasks that need to get done for this perfect outcome. Organize the list with first things first. Ask for help if this proves difficult.
3. Prioritize for the most important tasks and when or how they need to get done. Visualize each task, the next task, which leads to the next task until the task has been completed successfully in your head and on paper.
4. Include what needs to be done (tasks) and how you'd like to have these done.

Mistakes to Avoid

1. Asking for help without a plan.
2. Creating unnecessary confusion and added work for your helpers.
3. Failing to think through as carefully as possible what needs to be done and in what order.
4. Blaming others for disorganized chaos or giving up too soon. Consider inviting others to help resolve what appears chaotic.

Respect

Like trust, respect is earned daily through our actions, behaviors and attitudes and words. There are two distinctions to be made when referring to respect. There is respect for and value human beings, the environment and for things. We are not abuse, misuse or take for granted people or things, our own or the possessions of others. We are to treat all with respect. Then there is the respect for an individual's personal characteristics when interacting with them. Do they exhibit behaviors, attitudes and speak words consistent with good character and values that earn us respect?

Easy to remember: First, earn respect, then give respect and finally, you will be respected. Ask: do my current beliefs, attitudes, and values promote genuine respect for others and for myself? If not, learn and practice the skills and attributes that attract respect. A successful PSN is dependent upon the team, individually and collectively, demonstrating respect.

Respect is essential when asking for help. People are far more willing to help in time of need when they know that you respect them and their willingness to support you in your PSN.

Steps to Acquiring Respect

1. Closely examine your core belief, attitudes and values toward yourself and toward others.
2. Discard or modify those beliefs and traits that prevent or undermine your ability to respect self or others.
3. Adopt or develop beliefs, attitudes and behaviors that work for you and not against you when striving to earn respect.
4. Be more sensitive, considerate and compassionate with others even when asking for their help and they have declined.
5. When treated disrespectfully, don't react in kind. Use emotion management so you'll have no regrets.



- Promote a sense of worth and value in others even when asking for help has not turned out as expected or wanted.

Mistakes to Avoid

- Demand respect; refuse to earn it.
- Believe you are entitled; demanding; don't have to earn respect.
- Withhold respect from others due to appearance, cultural or ethnic differences, economic, age or sexual orientation.
- Attempt to appear respectful to deceive or manipulate others.
- Ridicule, embarrass or participate in destructive gossip.

You matter. give yourself the best chance with success in asking for help, skillfully.

Resources:

6 Steps for Keeping Balanced While Helping Others



[1] If you are helping someone else – friend, child, family member, care partner, whomever, remember:

- ~~You are doing important work by being supportive. Please remember that you are helping them in their life, and it is they who must make choices and choose directions.~~ ~~Be aware that you are helping them in their life, and it is they who must make choices and choose directions.~~
- Write everything down. Keep a notebook & log every conversation or appointment. Jot down questions. Include all meetings and evaluations, with dates & names.
- Keep important names & numbers visible in your home & with you. ~~Remember, you are not the only one who may need to know this information or to respond.~~
- Enlist help for yourself. Ask, and appreciate the assistance you receive. Let important people know of your involvement and appreciation. They can help you think of new approaches or help relieve your burdens.
- Be patient. All processes take time. Take time for normal time together as well – movies, cards, pizza: whatever you both enjoy. Turn to spiritual practices, too, if these are part of your life. Remember to breathe deeply and to spend time in nature.
- Be sure to factor in time for you too – nights off for play, social contact, relaxation.

Adapted by Personal Safety Nets® from "When Something's Wrong – Ideas for Families." The Canadian Psychiatric Research Foundation, Toronto, ON.



Ask for Help - Additional Resources

Asking For & Receiving Help: This is an area where we in the Western Hemisphere are particularly challenged. At Personal Safety Nets we believe that we all matter, and we all need to matter to others. We believe that there is enough abundance in our world to go around, that there is security in community, and that kindness and humor are effective tools.

Asking for help allows for a flow of generosity such that PAY IT FORWARD ideas will allow each of us to do what we can for others, as we can . . . and make receiving part of the balance.

[Download: Things That Get In the Way](#) [2]

[Download: Checking Assumptions](#) [3]

Steps to Successful Asking

[Download: The Long Version](#)

[4]

Asking for Help is a Sign of Strength

We all need help every now and then. Financial, spiritual, physical and emotional help, coming from others can get us through difficult times in our lives.

Many of us, though, are unable to recognize when help is needed or are reluctant to ask for the help that others can provide. We want to try to do most things our self. Some of us take real joy or get pleasure from caring for our yard, cleaning our house, shopping for favorite foods or freely traveling for business and leisure activities. Then, maybe, comes the day when all that has to change.

[5]An injury left Rosemarie Rossetti in a wheelchair, possibly for the rest of her life. To many, it was obvious by looking at the wheelchair that she could use extra assistance. Sometimes she wanted this help, sometimes not. But the wheelchair was a visible symbol suggesting dependence, and early on she became dependent on people for very basic health needs. Eventually, however, she sought independence, gaining freedom to move by driving a new minivan equipped with hand controls and a power ramp. Then she reached another milestone towards her independence - flying on a plane by herself. It had taken two years in order to develop the strength and skill set needed to get on an airplane, maneuver in the community, and care for herself in a hotel.

Rossetti was amazed of the special help she received: "I was seldom really alone on this trip. People at the airport, airline, taxi service, hotel, restaurant and training facility all were eager to offer VIP service. Doesn't it amaze you at times when people do things to help you? There are an overwhelming number of people in this world who are amazingly kind and thoughtful. Doing things to help other people makes us feel better. Oftentimes we feel honored that another person asked us for help. It is better to serve than to be served."



[6]She goes on to query, "How can people suggest that they are dependent on others in order to reach their goals? **What's wrong with asking people for help? Asking for help is not a sign of weakness, but rather shows insight in knowing how to achieve the goal.**"

We are all dependent on others in order for our achievements to be attained. Just look around you at the services that are performed for you that you take for granted. Someone delivers your mail, newspaper and packages, hauls away your trash, provides your residence with utilities, maintains your car, and grows and processes your food. You depend on their services for your everyday living, but seldom think of yourself as being dependent.

We strive to find a balance between being independent and dependent. The point of balance will be different for each person. There is a peace of mind in knowing that others will be there to help you when you are in need. Often our family and friends serve as our foundational support structure. Sometimes we need to build a support structure – to ask for the help of a community of others. You are asking for help, and offering help to others. This reliance enriches strong relationships. It gives the helping community (family, friends or friends of friends) a chance to bond

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as a team, to grow and to have new experiences.

Oftentimes we are afraid to ask for help. To many of us it is a sign that we are weak. We become reluctant to ask and try to do it ourselves or else abandon the thought and give up. We are missing out on so many opportunities due to our fear to ask others to lend a hand.

[7]We must simply ask! It's that simple, ask. Don't jump to conclusions and assume that the person we want to ask will not be in a position to help. Wait until they reach this conclusion themselves. If they can't help, then ask if they know someone else who can. It's the first step towards a new kind of independent and interdependent freedom.

~~Adapted by Personal Safety Nets from Rosemarie Rossett, Ph.D. Disability News, Rosemarie Rossett, Ph.D. is a speaker and writer. Rosemarie conducts presentations that bring out the best in people, to help them achieve their goals, and take charge of their lives. She is the author of Take Back Your Life, and is Ms. Wheelchair Ohio 2004.~~

Asking? Do It Well & Directly



[8]Here, in quick form, are our guidelines for learning to ask well

and directly for help:

1. **Define what's going on:** Only you know what your situation is - so keep the information flowing. Tell "safe" people what the issues are. What do you need? When? From whom? Know the answer to "wassup?"
2. **Ask for help:** Practice, practice, practice being direct. "Could you come over for 2 hours on Tuesday afternoons?" is better than "I sure wish I had more company."
3. **Be clear and specific:** This applies to not only your request for help, but also to your response. If you've asked for something clearly you assist not only yourself, but the person you've asked. They might say "no". If they do, it's likely that they'll be able to tell you why, offer an alternative time, or suggest another way to take care of whatever it is.
4. **Don't take "NO" personally:** Really, their no is more about their availability, the location, their limitations, or their own burdens. Additionally, if you avoid repeatedly asking the same person and thus burning them out, you'll be more likely to get a "yes" - a team can support you more than an individual can. The "no" is seldom about you.
5. **Get organized:** Having a team (list) of people you might ask for a certain type of problem, knowing what different people do best or like to do, who you'd like to see, who you've asked in the past - all of these are strategies. If it's too much, then maybe the place to start is with someone to help strategize and organize. In our book and in our workbook we give excellent advice about each of these.
6. **Keep on giving to others:** This is part of being healthier & happier - "Paying it forward" really works, for the one who gives, as well as for the one who receives.

Asking? It's the Same in Business!



[9]Francis J. Flynn, associate professor and co-director of the Center for Leadership Development and Research at the Stanford Graduate School of Business, noted for his research in the field of asking and giving reveals, **"People hate asking for help. It makes them embarrassed, guilty, and fearful that they will look incompetent."** In fact, those who want to ask for help **"grossly underestimate how likely others are to agree to requests for assistance."** What Dr. Flynn is telling us is that

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"individuals are more willing to help than we think."

In the business world, Flynn tells us **not asking translates to "missing out on huge opportunities for efficient collaboration"** between managers and workers because each side feels pressure. We already know how hard it is to ask for help, and help-givers tend to miscalculate how many will come to them for assistance ("... they simply don't recognize the social awkwardness people feel about doing so"). Flynn suggests, **"The best way to encourage employees to seek help when they need it is to reassure them explicitly that soliciting help won't put them in a bad light."**

Flynn's research finds, "Cooperation in organizations often doesn't occur because people misconstrue each other's motives. **In short, employees don't ask for help because they wrongly assume they won't get it, and managers don't encourage employees to ask for help because they wrongly assume that the employees will ask for it if they need it.**"



[10]When it comes to soliciting help, Dr. Flynn's says, **"Ask and you shall receive" works like a charm** and **"the direct approach works best."** He found that people who were going to ask for help consistently predicted a 50% increase in the number of requests they'd have to make to achieve their goal and get the help they wanted. **People are much "more likely than expected to offer help."** **What is most important is "how you make your request is likely to be more significant than the magnitude of what you're asking."**

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."



[11]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](#) [12], 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?**



[13]Gretchen Rubin's work, [The Happiness Project](#) [14] 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.**"

Make "Asking" Easier and More Natural



[15]From a very young age we're taught to ask politely for what we want, and to say 'thank you' once help is given. **As we get older, though, asking for help is often confused with or feared to be a personal weakness or vulnerability. Your messages said you share these worries.**

We want to help.

Research done by Dr. Deborah Serani, detailed in a [Psychology Today](#) [16] article, ***lists a number of myths, all of which have been proven false.***

Myth: Asking for help makes us look vulnerable. No, **reaching out well out is actually seen as a strength.** (read on)

Myth: People feel put out when you ask for their help. No, **we all need to help and welcome opportunities, when given the option to decline.**

Myth: Highly successful people never ask for help. No, **they actually ask more often, ask well, accept wisely.**



[17]'Asking for help' is not as easy as it sounds. Yet, not asking for help, or asking too late, can turn a manageable situation into something more serious. **So, how can you approach the task of asking?**

STEP 1: DEFINE WHAT'S GOING ON and accept that involving others can be helpful.

Look at the BIG PICTURE. What is coming up here? What would I like the outcome to be? If you give this some thought first, then you can set the stage for others to understand and help.

- Let's use an example. You're having knee replacement surgery. Ask, what will be happening and when? How do I feel about it? What kinds of help will I need? For how long will I need help? What would success look like: a new hip and no infection? pain free movement? Are there others who can tell me more about

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the experience and possible outcomes so that I'll be more prepared to get the help I need? Engage deeply with people who are safe, and keep communication flowing.

STEP 2: PRIORITIZE and ORGANIZE.

With your list of what might be helpful to you (from help with grocery shopping to help with insurance forms) it's now time to focus on prioritizing. It may not be possible to do it all. What's most important? Where are the holes? You can ask for help in identifying new sources for help with these. Again, there is benefit to asking others for ideas.

- **Then, ask yourself: what am I willing to accept, from what sources?** If you can accept help, the this step is also the "matching" step: **Whom do I ask? Where might help come from? Who might step in?** Once you've asked, it's time to evaluate offers, accepting, declining, or deferring offers of help. Each, of course, done with appreciation and kindness.

STEP 3: ACTUALLY ASK FOR SPECIFICS.

Consider writing yourself a script. What's going on? Invite help. Be direct, complete and specific. It's easier for folks to help if they know what you're looking for, and will accept. **So, think about: how to ask? In person? in an email? A letter? What exactly will I say? When?**

- Unfolding the task through the written word, will help you set the tone for a conversation. NOW you're ready to practice, practice, practice, and practice!
- Reading over your written words will help you get your thoughts out and be more at ease when you talk directly to others. Each time you try you'll be more comfortable. Ask a friend or family member to role-play. Talking to yourself in the mirror can work wonders too. Start with "is it okay if I ask you a question?" Almost no one declines, and one "yes" usually opens a door to another.

STEP 4: AN "ASK" IS NOT A "DEMAND" - IT ALLOWS FOR "NO".

Even "asking nicely" may end with a "no" response. Why? Because the person you asked is not available - they have a conflict; or they're not comfortable helping; or they're not capable of doing what you ask; or they're feel they can't do a good job - or any one of many other reasons!

- Understanding this in advance is important for and possibly critical for your psyche, your friendships and your ability to ask again and again. A "NO" reply is not personal. It's more about the other person's availability or limitations than it is about you!
- Pay attention to times when someone asks you for something and you decline. You'll soon see it's the same the other way around - **there are many reasons for a "no" and most have nothing to do with you!! It's the particular "ask" that's being rejected, not you!! Let's learn to accept the answer and say "thank you" for considering the request.**

STEP 5: KEEP ON GIVING TO OTHERS.

When you ask, even a "no" is helpful - maybe because that person can suggest another who can help or can give you some useful advice, maybe because their "no" clarifies your path.

- We'll all be better at the task of asking if we also learn to receive with graciousness, to appreciate whatever is offered, whether it's exactly what we'd hoped for or not, and to pay back or forward as we're able. If you want to feel better, there's nothing like helping someone else.

Here's Dr. Serani's wrap on the process:

Have realistic expectations for the kind of help you're seeking,

Express your needs simply and clearly,

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et others know that you appreciate their help,

Pat yourself on the back for being brave enough to ask for help.



[18]Some final thoughts:

- ~~Understand that "simple" solutions don't always mean "easy" implementation.~~
- Remember, even when you ask for divine help, it may be through human hands and hearts that the help comes.
- Find people you really trust to try out asking for help first. This will allow you to open up bit by bit, and not be overly exposed.
- A problem is a problem, whether it's easy or difficulty - the litmus test is how much it is impacting you or preventing you from moving forward. Belittling your problem as "not worthy of being solved" only serves to make it even more challenging to cope with.

Personal Safety Nets In the "Real" World!

Ed. Note: "Sarah" wrote to ask how Personal Safety Nets® concepts would help her navigate the time between starting a business and seeing revenue from it.

Time and again, we ask audiences for a show of hands if they've ever faced an unexpected change or a challenge. Every time, every single hand rises. Of course everyone has had such an experience! Then, when time allows we ask for some details about these situations, and what or who helped people cope. Each time, **participants demonstrate that we're not in this world alone, and that we can be better together. We show that if we believe in a certain set of values and work from Personal Safety Nets® assumptions, we'll have begun well. Employing thoughtful planning that focuses upon all aspects of our lives will better prepare us for whatever may come. Our resourcefulness and resiliency will grow.**

[19]Sarah wants who wants to start a new business. The first step is for her to look at her self, with this goal, as being in the middle of a safety net. Next we have to ask, who or what will provide support? While the sides of her personal safety nets are strengthened by resources covering financial, spiritual, family/friends, the stuff of life, intellectual, health and career issues, ***Sarah will pay special attention to what resources of support will be directed specifically to: financial, social, business planning, marketing, and business development.***

We might suggest that she start by identifying the resources that are available to her: Which people she has met who might serve as a sort of board of directors or sounding board as she ponders options? Which people, institutions, or organizations can fill the various roles that she'll need? Which can suggest others? Her third task is to gather resources: pulling together information and knowledge to create a plan. **Her financial base will be stronger if she know as much as possible about her competition: everything from how they work, to how**



much everything will cost.

Social or spiritual support might be valuable when seeking or adding stakeholders or board members - when facing seemingly insurmountable obstacles, staying focused or when networking. Creating a mission, vision and statement of values will provide more support. **Using existing resources and people to build interest among others will help spread the word as well as build some anticipation for the end product.**

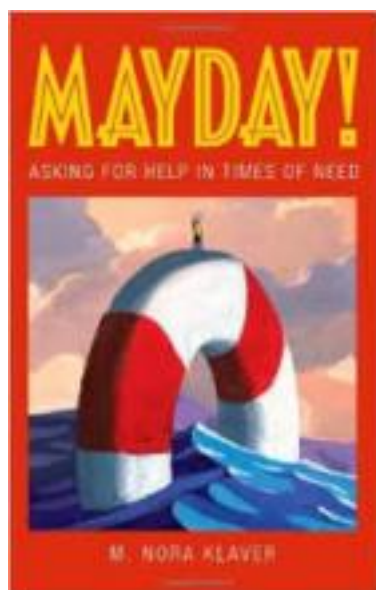
[20] Seeking professional and technical assistance from others (and not getting discouraged when someone declines to assist - it's NOT personal) will bolster this aspect of Sarah's net. Seeking to extend her outreach to people with broad connections who have created pitches or presentations will help things move more smoothly. **Most people are flattered by a request for their expertise or assistance, especially when it's clear that it's OK to say "no" or "not now."**

Sarah will be wise, too, to think of ways to take care of herself and her health while in this stress-related time of beginnings. **Keeping her eye on her goal of sustainability, sustaining new business shouldn't mean that she ignores her needs for sleep, exercise, and balance in her life as a whole.**

We heard from Sarah as she thought about her journey: **"Far deeper than the mechanics of people and process in developing a PSN is the safety net one must develop in their soul, heart and mind during trying, and what appears on the surface, impossible hurdles."** We wish her luck and hope to hear more from her - AND YOU!

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!)



[21] 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.

Adapted by Personal Safety Nets® from Shari Lifland, American Management Association (AMA). Shari Lifland is an editor and writer for American Management Association. She is editor of the e-newsletters "Moving Ahead," "Management Update," and "Administrative Excellence."



What Will Successful Asking Look Like?

Using a "succession of steps" approach will make asking for assistance/help easier and more effective.

[22]Climbing "asking steps" can be very helpful - not only because you're going to develop "asking" skills, but also

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because it will provide a way to take on and accomplish those skills, one at a time. It's important to remember, ***whenever you're tackling a project, pat yourself on the back and smile as you move towards your success***, rather than seeing you're only worthy of an "atta-boy" when everything is completed. We support the idea that gaining new skills and reaching for new goals is hard work, and always worthy of gratification - as opposed to delayed gratification - delayed for what?

In learning to ask easier and more natural, **STEP 1 asks you to DEFINE WHAT'S GOING ON. This means looking at the situation you're in, or the problem you face, or the needs you have - which could benefit from building a team.**

This step usually takes some research, some questioning, and some diligence on your part. You know what you're facing, and defining and conveying that to others is an important part of the task.

NOW, before moving ahead, add one thing! Right from the beginning, it's important to ask yourself (or the one you're helping): What would an ideal outcome be? *What Will Success Look Like? How would it feel?*

[23]Let's look at the concept of success. The noted psychologist and academic, Abraham Maslow, helped us see that success will look somewhat different for each of use - since there are no universal goals. However, success does have some common threads. **A long term success is really about feeling you belong, that you are noticed, and that what you're doing is good for both you and the people around you. Even though this vision is particular to each person, having it in mind helps you to know when it arrives.**

Without a vision, you will find yourself looped into reactive behaviors, projects that start and stop, goals that are seldom completed. Sometimes it can feel even a bit disconnected. It sounds a bit redundant, but basically, you're



not successful without a vision, and you need a vision to know success. **Which means that success looks like you and the vision you seek!**

So let's return to the "task of asking" and visit an example we've used before: you're having knee replacement surgery.

Step 1: define what's going on. Through some research, questioning, and diligence on your part, you learn ~~all you can about what will be happening and when. What kinds of help will be needed? For how long will it be needed? Are there others who can give information related to the experience and possible outcomes to go better prepared to get the help needed?~~

Then, Step 1A: What will success look like? What is the vision of this being successful? Is it a short term goal? Or long? Practical or philosophical. The vision you create and convey to yourself will determine your success.

[24]If you see the "task of asking" as a major struggle, then it will be reflected in your vision, and success will be hard to achieve or, at the very least, difficult. But **if you see the "task of asking" as more of a series of tasks you are willing to tackle and conquer - then your vision will be of a group working together to accomplish your goals - and whenever you work with or get help from this group, you'll feel successful.**

It's tempting to say, "I've got an upcoming surgery (or needs, or tasks, or problems, etc.) to worry about, so how can I worry about, or get involved in the task of asking others for help. Or to spend time on thinking about my



vision" But these go hand-in-hand! The vision of success (the completion of your goal/need fulfilled/surgery completed) won't happen by itself.

Most success is the result of a "team effort" and today is your time to begin to build you team. Be ready!

When your challenges and changes arise, first ask yourself what your vision of success will look like, and then use your skills and your team to make your vision come true.

[25]Remember - whenever you're tackling a project, pat yourself on the back and smile as you move

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towards your success. Celebrate along the way. It's a given that gaining new skills and reaching for new goals is hard work! So get started - you'll deserve some kudos!

Your Belief About Asking for Help

Ask yourself, how do you feel about seeking help from another? Do you ask? Be very honest with yourself! Do you believe that seeking help undermines your independence and conflicts with your ability to be in charge of your own life, or do you believe we are social beings who need to "ask" in order to cooperate with one another and ensure we grow and thrive?

[26]There seem to be strong opposing views held by those who hold fast to maintaining personal independence ("I don't need help/never ask") and those who support gaining independence through interdependence ("Asking is good"). **The first group often sees taking help from others as a weakness.** It's a learned and ingrained pattern of thinking that may be hard to overcome. Research shows that **the second group, those who support interdependence, are more likely to see asking as strength.** *Still there can be discomfort with actually how to increase ease with asking.*

At PSN, our goals include helping people understand the benefits of asking for help, and offering methods of being better prepared and able to undertake the task of asking for help. Too many of us run away from asking for help because it feels too difficult.



Ask for Help

Published on Personal Safety Nets (<https://personalsafetynets.com>)

[27]Let's focus on the idea that seeking help is a sign of weakness. If you're in this camp, we're definitely

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out to change your mind! We want to help you overcome this belief and allow you to develop a healthier sense of interdependence with those around you.

Dig deep; consider exactly why - the reasons - you think asking for help is a sign of weakness (?). Do you feel that you're totally independent and don't need any help? Do you see any person offering you help as doubting your ability to remain independent? Are you frightened of rejection or have a tendency for perfectionism? Do you feel vulnerable when you have to seek help? Have you been let down in the past and have sworn never to let that happen again? Do you worry that needing help serves as a sign of a lack of professionalism? Do you think that friends and family will see you as weak or inferior if you ask for help?

People who tell us they don't want to ask for help often use these as reasons. Their beliefs are reinforced in three ways; FIRST by movies, books and even games in which a hero gains the highest glory if he or she faces "impossible" problems and magically overcomes them on his or her own.

But most heroes have helpers, supporters and others, unacknowledged behind the scenes. Their success often depends on a lot of plain luck. These "helpers" may not be obvious but they are there, and a good hero benefits greatly from the assistance, advice and input of others.

[28]The first step is to stop comparing yourself with such unrealistic portrayals of heroes.

SECOND: a common tendency is to think you "should" be able to cope alone and manage without help. This tendency to use "I should" presents a very unrealistic standard. Are you building an invisible barrier around yourself that wards off the potential for new relationships and friendships? Are you taking the opportunity to learn about the value of give and take, and the compassionate cycle of love, care, and generosity for all?



THIRD: the idea of your own expertise. Being trained in one field of expertise does not provide you with immunity from continuing to seek help from others within that same field or from other sources.

You will be all the better for asking for help from others.

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