



When You Need Help

I think it is obvious that very few people are completely self-sufficient and almost all of us will require some type of help at some stage. I have recently noticed, however, that many people find it difficult to ask for help and I thought it may be worth exploring this challenge this month. I would also note that asking for help may be even more problematic outside the workplace so let's approach this from a broad perspective.

It seems to me that the question of how to ask for help boils down to one of two distinct paths:

1. Appealing to the other person's altruism or duty; or
2. Appealing to the other person's self interest

The first path requires practising the four most powerful words in the English language: "I need your help". It looks pretty simple but many of us struggle to enunciate those four words. Perhaps it is ego or independence or embarrassment. In any event, many of us experience some serious barriers in choosing this path. And yet many people we encounter are generous and happy to assist. The aftermath of every disaster is lit up with great stories of support and assistance, well beyond the call of duty. How many people descended on Brisbane to help in the clean-up operations after the floods?

The second path is more tempting but fraught with risk. It requires an open mind to consider the possible benefits to the "helper" and it also requires honesty not to over-sell or misrepresent them. A great example is the search for a mentor. I have spoken to a number of people recently who have been worried about asking another person to mentor them. They could only see the benefits for themselves and took some time to recognise the potential benefits to the mentor. In my experience, the majority of people would consider becoming a mentor if asked. I suspect that this is not so much through altruism but through the benefits they recognise or have experienced in the past. However, I would caution anyone who is inviting someone else to mentor them not to explicitly list the potential benefits to the mentor as the sales pitch may fall flat.

More generally, therefore, do not underestimate the power of identifying "what's in it for me", if only for your own mindset. However, be careful of talking up the WIIFM lest you inadvertently misrepresent it!



What are the success factors that will improve the probability that the other person will help you on this occasion?

- Be clear on what you are asking for so the scope is clear to the other person – very few people are willing to offer “blank cheque” support.
- Be willing to explain why you are asking them for help – if their talents are real and your rationale is pure, why not treat them with a compliment?
- Be open and honest about your needs – it may combat the ego factor.

What are the success factors that will improve the probability that the other person will help you on the next occasion?

- Remain within the scope of your original request – increasing your expectations beyond your “ask” will erode your good will.
- Be cheerful about the task – if their experience is pleasant they may be more open for a repeat involvement.
- Be appreciative – think about interesting and varied ways of saying “thank you”.

It takes courage to be willing and able to ask for help – and to receive it.