



## 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.

*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."*

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