

# ASK FOR HELP AT WORK

Difficulty: **MODERATE** | Frequency: **VARIABLE** | Duration: **5 MINS**

## WHY YOU SHOULD TRY IT

Asking for help can feel vulnerable. Especially at work, we often strive to appear competent and capable, and seeking out help is an admission that we can't do our jobs alone. We may also worry about imposing on our coworkers if they say yes, and feeling awkward if they say no.

Luckily, research suggests that many of our fears about asking for help are unfounded. In fact, we tend to underestimate the chance of a positive response by up to 50 percent—meaning that a “yes” is much more likely than we think.

## TIME REQUIRED

Just a few minutes, whenever you need a favor at work. In the long run, asking for help may actually save you time by making your work more efficient.

## HOW TO DO IT

In this exercise, rather than practicing kindness toward others, we are going to give someone else the opportunity to practice kindness toward us—by asking them for a favor.

Think of some area of your work where you could use a little help. Maybe you are struggling with a task and would benefit from a colleague's opinion or expertise. Or you're going on vacation and would like someone to cover one of your responsibilities. Perhaps you're experiencing some tension with a coworker and need advice on how to resolve it.

Whatever the case, identify the person who's in the best position to help you and make a direct request of them. You might be surprised by the answer.

## EVIDENCE IT THAT WORKS

Flynn, F. J., & Lake, V. K. B. (2008). [If you need help, just ask: Underestimating compliance with direct requests for help](#). *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 95(1), 128-143.

In this study, participants asked others for help of various types, including directions, a cell phone to borrow, and charitable donations. Ultimately, they received many more positive responses than expected, partly because they didn't realize how uncomfortable it is to say no.

## WHY TO TRY IT

Why do we underestimate how willing people are to help us? When we ask for help, we tend to focus on the burden of the task, like how complex it is and how much time it will take. But when we're *asked* for help, our focus is different: Instead, we're aware of how difficult, embarrassing, and awkward it can be to say no. As a result, we say yes quite

regularly.

Lest you worry about pressuring other people to help you, a great deal of research suggests that helping also feels good. So when other people comply with your requests, they get a happiness boost, too.

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This practice is part of [Greater Good in Action](#), a clearinghouse of the best research-tested methods for increasing happiness, resilience, kindness, and connection, created by the [Greater Good Science Center](#) at UC Berkeley and [HopeLab](#).

