

Make Your Ask a Give
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Every movement reveals us.
– MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE

Asking is uncomfortable. Many of you may be natural at developing relationships, but when it comes time to making an “ask” – whatever that ask may be – you fall short. Part of it may be a fear of failure that you ask for something that you don’t deserve, or someone else deserves it more, or you can’t deliver on it. It also may be a concern about jeopardizing relationships or trying to translate personal relationships into professional ones. Or, perhaps you are shy and not comfortable developing relationships in the first place, let alone making an ask for something that you want or need. Yet, not being able to ask – for that opportunity to represent a client, go on a pitch, or be considered for a job, promotion, leadership role or increased compensation – can impede your success. So how do you get there? Follow these tips and you should be on your way to mastering the art of the ask.

1. **Listen.** Before you ask anyone for anything, get to know them and their needs, interests and challenges. The more you know, the greater your ability to help them.
2. **Make Your Ask a Give.** By getting to know someone’s needs and interests, you learn if what you can offer aligns with what they need. So, rather than frame your ask as a favor, see instead if you can offer to be a resource.
3. **Be Generous.** Extend yourself. Whether it’s taking someone out, sending them a relevant article, helping their child get a job or giving them advice, be there to help. It’s much easier to ask when you’re a giver. And, importantly, if you help someone, be sure it is not a *quid pro quo*. Instead, you should be helpful with no condition or expectation of a return.
4. **Be Informative and Inquisitive.** People need to know what you do so that you can be helpful to them and they can be helpful to you. Often social acquaintances are unaware of each other’s jobs and interests. Let people know what you do and be inquisitive about what they do.
5. **Be Visible.** Get involved. If you have visibility, you will be a natural resource to others. Provide advice and direction to people who seek you out for guidance. If you are available to address needs that your contacts have, you will likely be more comfortable asking for help in the future.
6. **Be a Problem Solver.** If you are a problem solver, people will come to you when they face challenges. Say yes to requests for calls and meetings. If you’re not the one who can solve the problem, direct them to someone who can.
7. **Be a Connector.** It’s important to share your network. If you know people who are amenable and can be helpful to your contacts, make those introductions. That said, when you facilitate introductions, remember that your contacts become an extension of you. Be sure that you are comfortable vouching for the people you recommend.
8. **Be Worthy.** When you make an ask, be sure you are up to the task. Don’t put anyone in a compromising position to advocate or create an opportunity for you. Also, once you make an ask, be sure to deliver. Be responsive, considerate, humble and flexible in how you respond to someone who is willing to help.
9. **Blur Professional and Personal Lines.** Making an ask of a friend or family member can be particularly hard. But social media is blurring the lines between professional and personal, and if you are unwilling to access your personal network, you will pay too high a professional cost. If you are making an ask of friends and family, focus on being generous as well as being a point-person, problem-solver, connector and overall resource. In most relationships, a natural reciprocity will ensue. As you continue to extend yourself, you will become more comfortable asking for help when you need it too.

- 10. Do Your Homework.** When you ask someone to do something on your behalf, be sure you've done the legwork in advance. You should know precisely what your ask is and how the person you're asking can be helpful.
- 11. Make it Easy.** If someone is doing you a favor, minimize the work for them. So, draft the email, have the resume ready to go, know the best point of contact, make the time and location convenient, and attend to any other details so the person you ask is only doing what you actually need them to do.
- 12. Practice and Role Play.** If asking is hard for you, practice. Role playing can help you think through unanticipated issues and project more confidence when you make an ask.
- 13. Make Specific and Small Asks.** Build up your "ask tolerance" by starting with specific and small asks. This is a good way to test out a person's receptivity to assist. It will also get you more comfortable making bigger asks.
- 14. Consider the Venue.** Where you make an ask may determine the outcome. Be sure the person you are asking is in a comfortable place when you make your request. Also, be sensitive if anyone is witness to your ask in case someone else's presence would create an awkwardness.
- 15. Watch Your Physical Stance and Tone.** Think critically about whether your ask should be made in person (which is typically preferable) or by phone or email. If in person, make eye contact and be thoughtful about having an open physical stance. How you frame your request and your tone of voice is important too.
- 16. Evaluate the Timing.** A person's receptivity to an ask can vary based on when an ask is made. Time of day, week, month or year may impact the response. These considerations should be factored in to maximize the likelihood of a yes.
- 17. Ensure You Have the Right Audience.** Be sure you are not making an ask of the wrong person. Also, make your ask personal and tailored. Take the time to address someone individually if you're asking that they do something on your behalf.
- 18. Say Thank You.** Obvious right? But people often do not take the time to thank the people who have helped.
- 19. Be Prepared to Ask Again.** If you make an ask and the answer is "no," assume it means "not now." Ask the best way to follow up, the timing and if there are others whom you should contact. Your ability to ask and the types of asks you make will change as your relationships evolve and deepen over time.
- 20. Report Back.** Follow-up with the people whom you asked, ideally with a personal note or call. Share with them the results of their efforts, what worked and who else was helpful to you.

If you are still reticent to make an ask after reviewing these tips, think about what will happen if you don't make the ask. Remember—the risk of inaction (not making an ask) is often greater than the ask contemplated.

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Debbie has received numerous awards including being named among the Philadelphia Business Journal "Women of Distinction." She is also the recipient of the Anne X. Alpern Award. Debbie volunteers her time with several nonprofits including the Forum of Executive Women where she is a member of the board and Co-Chair of the annual Leadership Symposium. Debbie is Chair of Brooklyn Law School Women's Leadership Circle which runs a national women's law student and alumnae initiative. She received her B.A. from Yale University and her J.D. cum laude from Brooklyn Law School. A native New Yorker, Debbie lives in the Philadelphia suburbs with her husband; they have three sons. Learn more about Debbie at www.debbieepsteinhenry.com.