

Asking for Help?

What do these women have in common?

- A young mother overwhelmed with caring for both a newborn and a two year old
- A working woman struggling with balancing her work life with having a life
- A manager who feels she is not connecting with those who report to her
- A daughter trying to help her aging parents who live in another state
- A new widow whose husband handled the finances in the family.

As you may have guessed, they all could use some kind of assistance. Yet, how many of these women will ask for it?

Help can come in many forms. The young mom could ask a friend to watch the kids for a few hours so that she could take a nap. The working woman could seek out a mentor to help her make career decisions that would better resonate with how she wants to live her life. The manager could ask a colleague whom she respects, to coach her. The daughter could attend a local family caregiver support group for ideas on how to care for her parents' needs at a distance. The newly widowed woman could ask a trusted friend to advise her on the basics of family finance and act as a sounding board for any decisions that need to be made.

Why is it so hard to ask for what we need?

One of the many lessons I learned during my late husband's six year battle with liver disease is that there are times when even the most capable among us must ask for help. Whether it was because I'm a woman, a first-born, or just didn't want to impose, I found it extremely difficult to turn to others for even the simplest of aid.

When I examined my reluctance to request help from others, such as my friends and relatives, I came up with some heartfelt but often illogical reasons:

- I didn't want to appear weak, disorganized, or incapable.
- Everybody has his or her own challenges and might be too busy to deal with mine.
- Asking for help would make me feel dependent.
- I didn't want to be a bother.
- It would be easier just to do things myself.

What about you? Do you find it easy or hard to turn to people who care about you and ask for their assistance when you need it?

Have you ever thought that we are actually doing those who care about us a favor by coming to them for assistance? You give a gift when you ask for help. The people you ask feel important, useful, and, in many cases, honored that you approached them.

Think about the last time someone asked you for help. Did you find yourself making a judgment about him or her? Probably not. Didn't your mind start clicking to what you could do? If you couldn't help, you may have even felt guilty that you didn't do your part to help your friend. How many times, when you discovered that a family member had a hardship or challenge, have you said, "Why didn't you ask for my help?"

Whether or not we feel comfortable asking for help may be something we learned from our family of origin. It may also be based on past experience. Asking for help can also be seen as a skill. It might make it easier to ask for help if you talked with a therapist to see just why you are reluctant.

There may be some things that you would rather pay a stranger to do for than ask friends to do. Nevertheless there are many other favors that will give new meaning to the words family and friends. The next time you are feeling overwhelmed, need advice, or a shoulder to lean on, rather than hesitate, push yourself to ask for what you need. You will not only be helping yourself but also giving the person you asked a chance to feel better too!

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