

Elements of an Effective Request

To enhance understanding and provide context we will use the request to **complete and submit a report** to flesh out each of the below elements. Page three is a self-coaching worksheet that helps you learn more about your ability to make effective requests and uses the past as a marker.

A direct request is spoken (i.e., it does not remain in private conversation).

Often we hint around at what we want but don't specifically communicate the request – i.e., "It's been a while since I've seen that report" vs. "Would you please submit the payroll report to me?"

The request is made to a specific person.

This may seem obvious but there are many times when tasks are talked about but a decision is not made verbally as to who will complete the task.

The future action to be performed is specified.

There is a difference in requesting the payroll report and requesting the payroll report for FY11 First Quarter. It may be obvious to you which payroll report you're looking for and this needs to be clearly communicated to the person fulfilling the request.

The reason for the request is made clear.

Oftentimes, knowing this helps create buy-in from the person completing the task, particularly if they can see how this task ties in to the larger goals of the department and/or organization.

A time frame is specified.

Most people forget this step in making an effective request and suffering occurs as a result. In your mind, as the person making the request, you may need the payroll report in an hour vs. tomorrow afternoon or whenever the person can get to it. It is your job as the requestor to be clear about when the task is due. Expecting the person to prioritize and let you know when he/she can get to it may work in some situations when the task is not urgent. However, to avoid breakdowns it is best if you lay out your timeline up front. In doing so the person can determine whether they can meet your expectation, or whether they need to decline or delegate the task to someone else.

The emotional context is considered.

The emotional frame of mind of the person making the request and the person receiving the request has major bearing on how the request is spoken and heard. As the person making the request, pay attention to your voice (your volume, pitch and words used). There's a difference in the following: "I insist that you give me that payroll report right away!" and "Please submit the payroll report to me in 1 hour." Moods and emotions are predisposition for action – that is, they shape our action – and listening is an action. A request spoken in a hostile way versus a direct way will impact the listener and their ability and/or desire to fulfill the request. Also consider the mood of the person receiving the request – is the timing right for making this request?

Adapted by Jill Weinknecht Wardell, UMBC Training & Organization Development

SOURCE: "[Coaching to the Human Soul: Ontological Coaching and Deep Change.](#)" Alan Sieler. Newfield, Australia.

Standards are made explicit.

Often called Conditions of Satisfaction, these criteria are important to determine and communicate. If it's important that the report be formatted in a particular way, communicate this to the person. You may want to consider having a conversation with the person about the desired outcome and determining together the quality standards. Having agreement on these greatly impacts the result.

The request is made from a legitimate body.

Most of us don't consider how our body speaks a particular background sentiment (i.e., an apology, resentment, fear, etc.). What global story do you have about making requests (e.g., they're owed to me, others are doing me a favor, I should be able to do everything myself)? What new story is needed in order to shift your body into a more effective posture – one that generates teamwork, collaboration, and shared responsibility?

There is shared understanding of terminology.

Pay attention to any jargon used in making the request and check-in to make sure that the person fulfilling the request understands what is being asked of him/her. One great way to do this is to have the person repeat back what they heard you say. Breakdowns in communication can usually be cleaned up at this point.

Care is taken in words used.

Pay attention to the specific words you use and choose only those that communicate care for the person fulfilling the request. Your words create worlds – positive or negative – that impact those around you and will ultimately affect how others coordinate action with you. Choose them wisely and with intention.

For more tips and practices for relationships, visit: <http://www.umbc.edu/wellness/relationships.html>

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Worksheet for Making Effective Requests

Part 1:

- Think about two requests that you have made that have produced the desired results.
- What enabled this success (i.e., use of the above elements, other factors, etc.)?

Part 2:

- Think about two requests you have made that have not produced the results you anticipated.
- Remember how you made each request and check with the above elements to see what you may have omitted.
- See what happens when you include these in future requests.

Part 3:

- Who are you not making effective requests to about what?
- What is the cost to your relationships?
- What are you going to do about this?