

# Personal Safety Nets® e-Newsletter



Learning It's Okay to Ask

December 2010, Issue 35

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## Letters . . . We Get Letters



Dear Safety Nets Team:

I enjoyed your wonderful book. It affected me deeply. What struck me most is that although **the book is primarily about creating safety nets, it provides many useful tips on how to be psychologically healthy and feel emotionally fulfilled in general.**

I read your book and another (*Conversations with G-d*) and since that time have been experiencing a profound inner transformation. After reading the books I was finally ready to listen to and absorb much of their wisdom and begin to realize a change. **I've noticed that the quality of my interactions with friends, acquaintances, and even total strangers, has improved dramatically,** and that I'm listening better, being more empathetic, and forming deeper conversations. I'm judging people less, and appreciating and loving them more. And, as a result, I'm enjoying life much more profoundly.

## Asking? Just Do It!

*Dichotomy: a division into two mutually exclusive, opposed, or contradictory groups: a dichotomy between words and actions. "Do as I say, not as I do" or "It's better to give than receive".*

**There seems to be a dichotomy when we think about asking for help. Asking seems to be difficult, while giving when asked seems all too easy.**



In fact, research shows that those who "help others" feel better about themselves and have better health. But to give help to someone, they have to receive it, so there's another rub (or dichotomy). **How do we know what to give if others are having trouble asking?** Or what if their way of asking doesn't give us enough direction on what to offer?

To unpack **why few of us want to ask for help**, we turned to the work of Marci Alboher. In [Working the New Economy](#), Alboher suggests a few reasons: **we fear rejection, being seen as needy, weak, or playing on the goodness of others.** Just the thought of asking for help can make us feel uncomfortable or sheepish.

Couple this with the fact that "those who are approached for help are under social pressure to be benevolent. Just saying no can make them look very bad - to themselves and others." So that's why we often get overextended when we say yes to too many requests for help. **But can we get better at resolving the dichotomy, by learning both how to ask clearly, to say yes when we actually want to and can, and to balance our needs to give with a very real need to receive (for which we need to ask).**



In the PSN [November 2010 e-Newsletter](#) we focused on places and ideas for offering help in this holiday season. We hope we didn't add to your stress level by giving too many suggestions. To remind you of what's needed for stress-reduced giving and receiving, **we'll focus for a minute on the asking.**

Here are reasons and reinforcement for asking. In "[If You Need Help, Just Ask: Understanding Compliance with Direct Requests for Help](#)," research conducted by Francis J. Flynn and Vanessa K.B. Lake, found that those asking for help believed it was more likely that they would receive help if they were indirect about it - communicating their requests with a look, rather than a direct question. This is not correct! In fact, **people in the position of offering assistance said they were much more likely to help if asked point blank.**



"People are more willing to help than you think, and that can be important to know when you're trying to get the resources you need to



Now, because of my ability to be more empathic, **a surprising number of people have felt comfortable opening up to me and I feel that I've been able to help in some way**, whether it's just listening, serving as a positive role model, suggesting change, or recommending counseling.

I can now truly appreciate one of the basic truths of your book: **"the act of giving not only enriches the life of the person receiving the gift but the one who provides it as well."**

I have never felt clearer about my path and how to achieve my goals and have never felt more optimistic about my ultimate success.  
- [Alex Zedicoff](#)

Thank you, Alex!  
Your Personal Safety Net Team

## It's Not Too Late!

There's still time to get the **perfect holiday gift** for your favorite boss, relative or friend. What could be better than sending a gift certificate or one of our books in print or on disc: **Personal Safety Nets®: Getting Ready for Life's Changes and Challenges**, (we even have it available on audio) or our hands-on workbook, **Personal Safety Nets®: Get Ready/Get Started**.



Instead of the usual tie, scarf or

get a job done, when you're trying to solicit funds, or what have you." So, let's test their work by **learning to ask clearly and directly. Maybe, like with math problems, practice will help. But why?**

Gretchen Rubin's work, [The Happiness Project](#) is an account of the year she spent test-driving studies and theories about how to be happier. **She decided to start asking for help, and good things happened as a result of it. She got smart advice. She got support from others. She made many people feel good by respecting them enough to seek their counsel.** This



matches other research showing that people who help others are happier and healthier.

Rubin says, "Every day I get at least one email or call asking for help with something -- a request for an introduction, a recommendation, advice on how to find a job. Some of these requests are easy to answer, and in those cases, I respond quickly, either by doing the thing requested of me or explaining why I can't. Others leave me frustrated with the questioner. And when I'm frustrated it's usually for a variation of the same few reasons. **The person didn't ask a proper question; the person didn't appear to have done any work to solve the problem on her own; or she was coming to me for something that I wasn't really in a position to help with."**



## Asking? Do It Well & Directly!

If you already have our workbook, [Personal Safety Nets: Get Ready/Get Started](#), you'll want to turn to Chapter 3, pages 22 - 30 for complete information on Asking & Organizing. Here, in quick form, are our guidelines for learning to ask well and directly for help:

1. **Define what's going on:** Only you know what your situation is - so keep the information flowing. Tell "safe" people what the issues are. What do you need? When? From whom? Know the answer to "wassup?"
2. **Ask for help:** Practice, practice, practice being direct. "Could you come over for 2 hours on Tuesday afternoons?" is better than "I sure wish I had more company."
3. **Be clear and specific:** This applies to not only your request for help, but also to your response. If you've asked for something clearly you assist not only yourself, but the person you've asked. They might say "no". If they do, it's likely that they'll be able to tell you why, offer an alternative time, or suggest another way to take care of whatever it is.



4. **Don't take "NO" personally:** Really, their no is more about their availability, the location, their limitations, or their own burdens. Additionally, if you avoid repeatedly asking the same person and thus burning them out, you'll be more likely to get a "yes" - a team can support you more than an individual can. The "no" is seldom about you.

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Both our [blog](#), and our

[Facebook](#) page offer you the opportunity to gain up-to-the-minute news on PSN content, ideas, and issues that affect PSNs for everyone.

## (NEW) Cool Free Downloads

Maybe we've said all we can about Asking for Help, but **we're trying to drive you to our fun and informative website**, so go ahead -



read our new "[Learning to Ask for Help](#)" or any of our other Cool Free Downloads you may have missed in the past. We've got a **variety of information to keep you busy, knowledgeable and working on many parts of your personal safety net.**

Want to read past editions of the PSN e-Newsletter?

5. **Get organized:** Having a team (list) of people you might ask for a certain type of problem, knowing what different people do best or like to do, who you'd like to see, who you've asked in the past - all of these are strategies. If it's too much, then maybe the place to start is with someone to help strategize and organize. In our [book and in our workbook](#) we give excellent advice about each of these.

6. **Keep on giving to others:** This is part of being healthier & happier - "Paying it forward" really works, for the one who gives, as well as for the one who receives.



## Asking? It's the Same in Business!

Francis J. Flynn, associate professor and codirector of the Center for Leadership Development and Research at the Stanford Graduate School of Business, noted for his research in the field of asking and giving reveals, **"People hate asking for help. It makes them embarrassed, guilty, and fearful that they will look incompetent." In fact, those who want to ask for help "grossly underestimate how likely others are to agree to requests for assistance."** What Dr. Flynn is telling us is that "individuals are more willing to help than we think."



In the business world, Flynn tells us **not asking translates to "missing out on huge opportunities for efficient collaboration"** between managers and workers because each side feels pressure. We already know how hard it is to ask for help, and help-givers tend to miscalculate how many will come to them for assistance ("... they simply don't recognize the social awkwardness people feel about doing so"). Flynn suggests, **"The best way to encourage employees to seek help when they need it is to reassure them explicitly that soliciting help won't put them in a bad light."**



Flynn's research finds, "Cooperation in organizations often doesn't occur because people misconstrue each other's motives. **In short, employees don't ask for help because they wrongly assume they won't get it, and managers don't encourage employees to ask for help because they wrongly assume that the employees will ask for it if they need it.**"

When it comes to soliciting help, Dr. Flynn's says, **"Ask and you shall receive" works like a charm** and **"the direct approach works best."** He found that people who were going to ask for help consistently predicted a 50% increase in the number of requests they'd have to make to achieve their goal and get the help they wanted. **People are much "more likely than expected to offer help."** What is most important is **"how you make your request is likely to be more significant than the magnitude of what you're asking."**



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