

REQUESTS

"My belief is that, whenever we say something to another person, we are requesting something in return."

- Marshall Rosenberg

Fundamental question for requests: How can we express our requests so that others are more willing to respond compassionately to our needs?

The prerequisite for a clear request is that we have done the work to access the core needs that we are seeking to meet with this request.

The prerequisite for a compassionate request (as distinguished from a demand) is that we choose curiosity over being right.

REQUEST PROCESS

1. Get clarity on your need.
2. Present your need clearly and in positive language.
3. Choosing curiosity over being right, ask if the listener would be willing to help meet your need.

FOUR TYPES OF REQUESTS

empathetic connection:

Often takes the form of the speaker venting or ranting. There is an 'implicit' request to the listener for verbal or non-verbal acknowledgement that the feelings and needs behind the speaker's words have been understood.

emotional honesty:

We wish to know the listener's honest emotional reaction to our words

Try: "Could you tell me how you feel right now having heard what I just said?"

Avoid saying: "What's wrong?" "Is something wrong?"

understanding:

We wish to hear the listener reflect their understanding of our words

Try: "I want to be sure that I've communicated myself clearly; would you reflect back what you just heard me say?"

Avoid saying: "Can you tell me what you just heard me say?"

action:

Specific, doable, positive action that we hope would fulfill our needs

Try: "Would you be willing to...?"

Try: "Would you be up for...?"

Avoid saying: "I need you to stop..."

EXERCISE ONE: LEARNING FROM UNSUCCESSFUL REQUESTS

1. Think of a *request you made* of someone recently that did not go well.
2. Practice reformulating the request to be in positive action language, specific and doable, and/or referencing feelings and needs. Why do you think this version could be more successful?

Example

I said: Could you stop interrupting me?

The listener may have been more open to hearing something like:

Could I have three minutes to give an account of my perspective?

Because: They could have been triggered by the original request when they heard negative action language ("stop interrupting"). It would have also been helpful for me to say something specific and doable, such as a concrete timeframe in minutes.

EXERCISE TWO: FROM DWELLING TO A COMPASSIONATE REQUEST

1. Think of a request you wanted to make of someone recently *but did not* because you were dwelling.
2. Why were you dwelling? Did you have clarity on your needs? Did you know what kind of request to make?
3. Practice formulating a clear and compassionate request.

Example

I wanted to say: This is unacceptable. You need to give us an update on the maintenance requests.

I was dwelling because: I've chosen being right over connecting with and clarifying my needs. I wanted to make a demand instead of a request. My demand uses vague language.

The listener may have open to hearing something like: I'm finding myself to be antagonistic because I don't have clarity on the progress with those maintenance requests that were submitted on Thursday. Could you send me an email by the end of the day with an update from the maintenance staff?

EXERCISE THREE: HEARING THE REQUEST BEHIND THE DEMAND

1. Think of a recent situation *where you were on the receiving end* of a demand or an unclear request.
2. Take a moment to connect with what might have been the needs behind this demand or unclear request.
3. Reformulate the demand or unclear request you heard to contain positive action language, specific and doable actions, and/or references to feelings and needs.

Example

I heard: "I need to take a break from talking to you right now."

The needs behind this unclear request / demand might have been: self-connection, clarity

I might have been able to more compassionately respond to this request and see those as the unmet needs if I heard: I'm feeling out of touch with myself because I'm triggered and unable to communicate in the way that I'd like to. Would you be willing to continue this conversation after lunch?