

NURSING THAT WORKS



How To Ask For Help
And
Increase Your Odds of Getting It

by Susanne Gaddis, PhD
The Communications Doctor

NURSING THAT WORKS: How To Ask For Help And Increase Your Odds Of Getting It

By Susanne Gaddis, PhD
The Communications Doctor

AUTHOR'S NOTE:

This unit is specifically designed as an educational resource for nurses.

UNIT DESCRIPTION:

This unit will provide you with practical tips, tools and techniques that can be immediately applied to improve your ability to ask for and receive help.

By learning how to ask for help and enlisting the support of others, nurses and healthcare organizations will see an increase in motivation, productivity, self-esteem and self-confidence.

At the completion of this unit you will be able to:

Describe why it is important to ask for help.

Identify the benefits of asking for help.

State the difference between asking for help directly and indirectly.

Differentiate between phrases to use and to lose when asking for help.

Identify the importance of establishing a timeline.

Describe a three-step process for praising others for their contributions.

Prior to beginning the unit, read the following real-life scenarios and think about similar situations you've experienced. At the conclusion of this unit, consider discussing the content of this unit with others. By working together, you are encouraged to find ways to incorporate this information into your workplace.

CASE STUDY

Jenny has been a nurse for 8 years. During that time she has become comfortable asking for help. "Most nurses are very organized and capable of handling the majority of things on their own. However, there are certain situations that you can't handle on your own. So learning to recognize when and how to ask for help is very important."

Jenny suggests that when asking for help, that nurses make sure to ask rather than demand. For example, by saying, "Hey, I'm really busy at the moment, could you please help me out with this," you're more likely to get someone's cooperation than by saying, "Go bathe Mr. Jones." Another important factor in asking for help is to pay attention to your tone of voice.

WHO NEEDS HELP?

Whether you are a new or seasoned healthcare professional, knowing when, how and who to ask for help can be extremely beneficial. After all, there are times when everyone needs a helping hand. For example:

- You're new to your position and need to understand policies and procedures for admitting a new patient.
- You're short-staffed (again!) and need to ask someone on the next shift to finish something that you started but weren't able to complete.
- Dr. Harold leaves orders that are illegible, and you need clarification before you call the pharmacy.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS?

The benefits of asking for help include:

You save time. When you ask for help, a natural synergy is created. So why spend precious time spinning your wheels? By asking for help, you can reduce the amount of time needed to complete any task.

Tasks are more enjoyable. With the support of others, tasks will seem less tedious and more enjoyable. This is especially true when you receive help with mundane tasks such as filling out paperwork, sorting, collating, filing, etc.

You save money. When you know you need help and you ask for it, you can often avoid costly mistakes; thereby saving you and your organization money.

You save your sanity. When you need help and don't ask for it, you're likely to experience stress and frustration. Therefore, by reaching out and asking for assistance early on, you can reduce unnecessary aggravation. Rather than thinking that good things happen to those who wait, by identifying what you need early on and then asking for it, you'll save your sanity.

You avoid procrastination. By asking for help, you can spark the enthusiasm needed to get started or continue working towards a specific goal. With help, you're likely to be more accountable to yourself and others. After all, knowing that you'll need to keep your part of a bargain keeps you on task and on time.

You avoid being viewed as a martyr. If you're a person who always handles everything on your own without ever enlisting the support of others, BEWARE! This may have a negative impact on how you are viewed. Research has shown that co-workers value collaboration and teamwork. Therefore, by asking for help, you will be viewed as less of a solo act and more of a team player, one who is able to rely on the individual strengths and talents of your team.

You empower others. People get a big boost to their self-esteem and self-confidence when they know they were able to help. Why? Because, when asked for help, they are able to use their strengths, talents, knowledge and abilities. Asking for someone's help can be a big morale boost.

To fully understand this, imagine where you would be today if no one ever asked for or needed your help. Also consider how undervalued people feel when they are not asked to contribute.

Additionally, when people are not given enough responsibility in an organization, they begin to question their value and whether or not they are needed at all.

You develop future leaders. Imagine if you were never given the opportunity to apply your knowledge, strengths and abilities. Where would you be professionally? The answer: Exactly where you started. Typically, people won't progress in their profession unless they are given opportunities to advance. By asking others to take on new challenges and then coach and mentor them to success, you will allow them to develop the knowledge and skills necessary to become the leaders of tomorrow.

DIRECT VS. INDIRECT ASKING

Depending on the situation, there are two ways you can ask for help: directly or indirectly. A direct approach is best when:

- 1) You know exactly what you want and need.
- 2) You're short on time.

15 DIRECT WAYS TO ASK FOR HELP

When using a direct approach use phrases such as:

I need for you to help me with . . .

I need your assistance with . . .

I need your guidance with regard to . . .

I need your expertise with regard to . . .

I'd like to get your input on . . .

I'd really appreciate your insights regarding . . .

It would really help me/the team, if you would . . .

Could you please help me by . . .

Here's how you can best help me/the team right now . . .

Here's what I need for you to do . . .

I need for you to contribute by . . .

I'd like to get your support in the form of . . .

I'd like for you to do the following . . .

Please show me how to . . .

Please demonstrate how to . . .

I'd like to get your support by having you do the following . . .

It would be helpful if you show me how to . . .

INDIRECT ASKING

An indirect approach is best used with individuals who have a solid understanding of what needs to be done. Using an indirect approach gives the person being asked for help the opportunity to give input regarding how they can best contribute.

An indirect approach is best when you want to promote collaboration and teamwork.

8 INDIRECT WAYS TO ASK FOR HELP

When using an indirect approach consider using the following phrases:

How do you think you could help me with . . .

What aspect of this would you like to handle?

What part of this would you like to take on?

What ideas do you have with regard to?

What contribution would you like to make?

What do you have in mind with regard to helping me . . .

Based upon your experience, how does this all fit together and what part of this would you like to take on?

What are some of the ways you'd like to help?

PHRASES TO LOSE WHEN ASKING FOR HELP . . .

If you really want someone's help, it's best to avoid the following phrases (*because this might be what their thinking).

"If it's not too much of an imposition, could you . . ."
(*Of course it's an imposition!)

"If it's not too much trouble . . ." or "I'm having trouble with . . .could you . . ."
(*If you're already in trouble, don't drag me into it.)

I really hate to bother you, but . . .
(*I really hate it too!)

I was just wondering . . .could you . . .
(*Well, I never wanted to stop a good wonder, so keep on wondering.)

I really hate to ask you, but . . .
(*And I really hate that you're asking me.)

I was hoping you might be able to . . .
(*And I was hoping that you wouldn't ask me to. . .)

Since you're not doing anything right now, could you . . .
(*What do you mean, not doing anything? Can't you see I'm busy!)

I can't seem to . . .
(*I can't seem to either!)

I don't have time to . . .
(*And you think that I have time to?)

Nobody else wants to do it, so could you . . .
(*No!)

Could you just do this for me . . .
(*I could, but then you'll just be asking me to do it again next time.)

We didn't think you'd mind, so we signed you up for . . .
(*Well I do mind, so take my name off the list.)

I'm sorry I didn't tell you sooner, but . . .
(*I'm sorry too!)

If it's not a problem . . .
(*Of course it's a problem!)

You wouldn't want to help me, would you . . .
(*No!)

LET OTHERS KNOW WHAT YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS ARE

One of the top reasons why others may resist helping you is if they think you are passing off your own responsibilities to them. Therefore, you can increase the likelihood that others will cooperate by informing them of how you will be spending your time.

For example:

- While I'm turning the patient in room 1210, I need for you to complete passing meds.

Or

- During the next half hour while I'm in the meeting, I need for you to keep a close watch on Mrs. Lowe. Should her vital signs change please come and get me.

ESTABLISH A TIME LINE

No one likes it when he or she is given something to do at the last minute. Therefore, when asking for help, it's best to ask early – giving ample time for the task to be completed.

It's also best to establish a timeline.

For example:

- By the end of the week, we need to convert all of the patient records to reflect the changes in insurance. By the end of

today's shift, I need for you to have a clear list of all of the insurance companies addresses and phone numbers.

- It looks like we're running low on surgical tape. In the next half hour I need you to order five more units.
- Mrs. Jones' mother is on the phone, and she wants to get an update on how her daughter is doing. I think Dr. Smith is still making rounds. In the next few minutes, I need for you to locate him and let him know that Mrs. Jones is on line two.

THANKS FOR THE HELP!

There's nothing worse than helping someone and not being acknowledged for it. So, make it a rule to recognize the contributions of others by saying, "Thanks!"

When offering praise, consider using all three of the following steps:

1. Say thank you.
2. Tell them specifically what they did to help you. Here, include the specific behaviors that made a positive difference for you.
3. Tell them how their help impacted you, the team, the organization, etc.

For example:

- Thank you so much for tracking down Dr. Smith earlier. It was really important for Mrs. Jones to learn that her daughter is doing better.
- I really appreciate you passing meds tonight. That allowed me to focus on straightening up the nursing station.
- Thank you for explaining the new policy we have for admitting patients to our unit. Now I feel confident that I can handle things on my own.

TEST YOUR SKILLS

Now let's test your new skills. Based upon what you've learned, take a look at the scenarios below and answer the following questions:

SCENARIO #1

It was a hectic day on the unit and nurse John needed to lift a paralyzed patient of substantial size. Rather than asking for assistance, John decided to lift the patient on his own. Three years later he still experiences back pain. If John could go back in time, this would have been perfect situation in which to ask for help. "At the time, the patient had asked me to lift him, and rather than waiting until I could find someone to help me, I decided to lift him on my own.

What steps could John have taken to prevent his injury?

In a similar situation, whom would you ask for assistance?

What are some phrases John could have used when asking for help?

SCENARIO #2

When she didn't show up for report on time, Nancy's supervisor went to look for her. The supervisor found Nancy working diligently to finish several of her assigned tasks.

What may have been the reason(s) that Nancy didn't ask for help?

What could Nancy have done to insure that she finished her tasks on time?

When asking for help, would a direct or indirect approach have worked best for Nancy?

Bonus: Think about a situation when you waited to ask for help. If you would have asked for help, how would it have affected the outcome?

SCENARIO #3

Sally and Judy both work on the same unit and both of them need different days off. Sally wants to celebrate her 59th birthday with her family and Judy wants to attend her son's school performance. Both are in need of help.

How could Judy and Sally create a win/win situation by asking for help?

Would a direct or indirect approach work best?

If you were in a similar situation, what words would you use to ask for help?

AUTHOR:

Susanne Gaddis, PhD, known as The Communications Doctor, is an acknowledged communications expert who has been teaching the art of effective and positive communication since 1989. Gaddis' workshops, seminars and keynote presentations are packed with tips and techniques that can be immediately applied to help improve morale, decrease staff turn-over, increase productivity and improve interpersonal communication and cooperativeness in a healthcare setting.

As a communications professor, motivational speaker, author and member of the National Speaker's Association, Susanne has appeared on nationally syndicated radio, TV and video programming and has authored articles appearing in *The Journal of Training and Development*, *The Whole American Nurse*, *The Healthcare Career Guide*, *The Handbook of Public Relations*, and on Microsoft's Small Business Online.

Her clients include The Virginia Nurses Association, The New Mexico Nurses Association, The Wisconsin Nurses Association, Blue Cross Blue Shield, Bayer Corporation, UNC Hospitals, Rex Hospitals, East Texas Medical Center, NASA Johnson Space Center, SAS, Oracle, EMC and others.

For additional resources on effective communication including a FREE newsletter, or to book Dr. Gaddis for an upcoming conference, staff retreat or in-service training, call 919-933-3237, or visit <http://www.CommunicationsDoctor.com>