



## Learning to Ask for Help

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As Carrie Houser James, MSN, RN, CNA, President of the Center for American Nurses, so aptly states, “Once a nurse, always a nurse.” As a professional nurse, your role frequently extends past the end of the workday as family, friends and neighbors often seek your nursing wisdom and assistance with a variety of personal matters. Like most nurses, you are very willing to help them, regardless of the setting and situation.

As a professional nurse, you have given help to others in a multitude of roles: caregiver, advocate, mentor and teacher. Yet it is being in the role of receiving help with which many nurses struggle. Nurses are not accustomed to nor do they enjoy being in the position of needing assistance or guidance.

The etiology for this reluctance may have been initiated in your first role as a staff nurse. As a staff nurse, you were probably instructed that the “ultimate” responsibility for patient care rested on your shoulders. If a physician forgot to order a medication, you addressed the oversight: if a nursing assistant did not perform AM care, you made certain the tasks were completed. Over time, the reluctance for delegation and the hesitancy for asking for help were ingrained as you became the person who always handles everything without ever enlisting the support of others.

### The Benefits of Asking for Help

There are distinct advantages in learning to ask for help. Dr. Susan Gaddis, author of the Center for American Nurses *Nursing that Works* series, *How to ask for help and increase your chances at getting it*, writes of the benefits of asking for help including:

**Saving time and money.** When you ask for help, *you* create a synergy that leads to the reduction in the amount of time needed to complete any task. When you ask for help and guidance, you can often avoid costly mistakes saving you and your healthcare organization time and money.

**Avoiding being viewed as the martyr.** Being perceived as the person who never enlists the assistance of others may have a negative impact on how you are viewed, as most co-workers value collaboration and teamwork.

**Developing others.** By asking for help, you empower and mentor future leaders and help to develop their strengths. In addition, you make them feel valued for their talents, knowledge and abilities.

### Passively Asking for Help

In the past, you may have met resistance when you requested assistance from others. Perhaps it was not the request that led to their hesitancy; it was the manner in which it was

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requested. If you initiate the request for help by using a passive statement, it may result in immediate untoward negative feelings toward the request that follows. For example:

**If you start your request by stating:**

“I really hate to ask you...”

“If it’s not too much trouble...”

“Nobody signed up for this...”

**What they may be thinking is:**

“I really hate it too!”

“Of course it’s trouble!”

“I didn’t either!”

By learning how to ask for assistance without beginning your statement in a passive or negative tone, you will have better results in gaining the other person’s engagement. In addition, if they know what your contributions will be towards the collective process, you increase the likelihood that others will collaborate with you. For example:

“While I am passing medications in room 1309, could you please get Mr. Smith ready for his x-ray?”

## Direct verses Indirect Asking

Dr. Gaddis writes that, depending on the situation, there are two ways to ask for help: directly or indirectly. A direct approach works best when you know exactly what you need and are short of time. An indirect approach can be used when a person has knowledge of what needs to be done and allows them the opportunity to have input with the direction of their contributions.

Listed below are examples of phrases to use when asking for help:

### Direct Phrases for Asking for Help

- I need your assistance with....
- 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 if you would...
- Could you please help me by...

- Here’s how you can best help me right now...
- Here’s what I need for you to do...
- I need you to contribute by...
- Please show me 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 Phrases for Asking for Help

- 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 on 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?

## Showing Appreciation for their Help

After you have received the assistance, make a conscious habit for acknowledging the contribution the other person has made. Be sure to tell them the results of their action and how it helped you or the organization.