



## **KNOWING HOW TO ASK IS AN ART, A BOLD GESTURE AND A CONQUER**

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Since we're children we start asking and demanding continuously. Growing up, though, we lose that fertile attitude to ask in order to learn something. And we lose the essential capacity to ask to obtain something, materialistic or unmaterialistic: love, help, attention, advice, a pay rise, a day of vacation, new opportunities, a borrowed book, a lending hand to help us moving out.

Often, although it's everything but true, our needs appear to us so obvious, explicit and visible that asking somebody to help us out to satisfy them turns out to be completely useless: if we aren't already activating ourselves to achieve our goals it means we don't really want to do it, right?

In other cases, our needs seem to be clues of inadequacies that contradict our autonomy as adults, and mortify our social identity. It turns out to be a much better idea not to undercover ourselves.

**Place of weakness.** In terms of a relationship, the simple act of ask something puts us into a place of weakness towards the other person, to which we address a decision (yes/no) that involves us. If the other person says yes, our place of weakness is confirmed. We'll have a debt of gratitude to carry, and we'll need to settle it sooner or later. Also, this one turns out to be a good reason not to ever ask for anything.

But asking exposes us to the risk to get no as an answer. The consequences of this scenario, in our perception, expand from the specific object to ourselves. And to our value as people. An open wound that we might prefer to avoid.

**Saying no to ourselves.** So it happens that, for as more important a request is for us, the more we find a bunch of good reasons to not formulate it. Substantially, we're having such a hard time asking also because we answer no to ourselves on our own, before even formulating the request.

**Knowing how to ask is an art.** Knowing how to ask concerns specifically these two things: to perceive our own vulnerability, and to have faith in our value and in the good sympathy of others. An extreme case studies, and that's why it's very interesting, is offered by the musician Amanda Palmer in a Ted Conference about some years ago. *Asking is not easy because it makes us vulnerable, she says. But when you ask for something you establish a contact with people. And they help you out.*

**Shameless Energy.** The training of Palmer to ask contains some years of practice, staying immobile as a statue, completely white body painted, in the middle of the street. Also, an innumerable number of nights *couchsurfing* (it's about getting hosted by somebody on their couch). And over half a million euro crowfunded in 2012 for a new album, with *Kickstarter*: the biggest success at the time on that platform.

Both Palmer's conference both the following book she wrote (The art of asking) have been addressed to as controversial. I've the suspect this is also due to Palmer's shameless energy with which she sustains her thesis.

Come on, let's not fool ourselves, asking is anything but decent! Well being people don't ask! And the true man (a famous advertising campaign said so several years ago) must never ask for anything.

**Knowing how to ask, strategically.** After all, even the Rolling Stones sing about it: You Can't Always Get What You Want.

But if we decided to try and ask for something, how would we do it? If we as children asked shouting and whining, as adults we may rely on other strategies. Psychology Today gives us some good tips. They might work, especially for who's not Amanda Palmer. The last one is the most important.



**Dignity and courtesy.** Substantially, it's all about making one request at a time. It has to be reasonable and well correlated by a structured, brief and convincing argument. It's about knowing how to ask with courtesy and dignity, and at the right moment (that means when our interlocutor has the chance to give the proper attention to the request).

It's also about not manipulating the interlocutor (he could feel bad towards us) asking a no-ending series of onerous requests, after have obtained a first approval.

We may want to let our interlocutor the possibility to say no (she may have good reasons in doing so) without this to prejudice the relationship. Finally, it's about not dwell on the eventual negative answers. It's better to think that all might change into more favourable circumstances.

**Faith and initiative.** *The majority of people don't ask, and sometimes this fact separates people who are able to do something from people who just dream about doing it. If you fear failure you will not get much far away,* says Steve Jobs, on telling about a phone call he made when he was twelve years old.

At twelve he still wasn't 'Steve Jobs'. I am not saying here that you should identify yourself with Jobs, but to do it with a faithful, entrepreneur twelve years old child that *might* become Jobs.

**In between asking and expecting.** So, to ask is a gesture of faith, freedom and courage. It's a conquer. And it's also an act that needs discernment: the difference between knowing how to ask and expecting (or to require) is crucial. To expect for something is the opposite of asking for it, as well as a slap is the opposite of a caress.

Expecting for something, on the assumption that the other person *should* agree (and not just *want to*), and do it without being in a powerful position, is not only ineffective but also extremely stupid. It transforms the possibility of a yes into the certainty of a no.

**The role and the person.** Even who's righteous to pretend (*Come tomorrow at 7 a.m.! Clean up your bedroom! Archive these documents!*) should exercise in the subtler and humane art of asking. With this choice of trait and pitch you're able to communicate respect instead of arrogance. And you're able to give your interlocutor the joy of answering with a necessary, but formally free, yes. Also, it's more gratifying because it isn't aimed at the role, but at the person.