

Leaders – and the Power of Requests

Rhea Blanken

Request – the act of asking someone for something, either to fulfill certain conditions or to produce a specific result. It is a three-part communication model: (1) who, (2) what and (3) by when. The person being asked has three response choices: accept the request, decline it, or make a counteroffer to the original request.

Leadership Rule of Thumb: executives get paid to make and manage the fulfillment of requests. The higher up the leadership ladder one advances, the more numerous the requests a leader must make and manage. While delegation is a traditional tool in a leader's productivity arsenal, it is the making of requests that adds the real advantage to producing results for both the one requesting and the one being requested.

This sounds so obvious and even rather simplistic. Making requests of others for support is an obvious action in theory but not so much in practice. Skilled leaders in the use of requests know that making requests of others (peers, subordinates and even of one's superiors) offers opportunities for encouraging people to step into a larger awareness of what is possible, to take on more responsibility, to be more productive and successful. Requests open up the opportunities for contribution, generosity, accomplishment and partnership.

What stymies requests, usually occurs in the mind of the requestor. "Will they say no" or similar negative thoughts. A leader is not inhibited by these thoughts. The difference is the requests live in the dialogue between people, not in thinking. We can all recognize the paralysis that thinking can conjure up for us.

Do you remember growing up in middle school, then in high school, and facing the fear of rejection, the mistake in front of the class, or in front of our classmates? Oh, the embarrassment of it all. Scarred for life. If it didn't happen to you, you worried it would. Failure and all it means. Somehow a "no" became equated to "failure." Well, get over it. It's time to step beyond the thinking that stops you, to take the reins and move forward with gusto. Risk-taking requires stepping beyond your comfort zone.

So, now that we know the power of a thought to stop us, step into the power of being in communication. The act of making a request occurs in the communication between at least two people. The recipient of the request should experience the request as free from force, intimidation or coercion. The freedom to say "no" is inherent in the request. That freedom grants the opportunity to give a counter offer.

"Can you have that report by 3 p.m. on Thursday?" "No, but I'll have it to you by 5 p.m." or "I can have it by 3 p.m. if I can put off the other projects until Friday." Clear communication of whom, what and by when. Where do your communications fall short of clarity? How do your requests empower those with whom you work?



Leaders – and the Power of Requests

Rhea Blanken

Have you been in a position where you feel unable to say “no,” then suffer with the self-imposed responsibility that really isn’t yours? Leadership is not about imposing but leading. A leader empowers those around him or her to take responsibility; to be action oriented; and to be risk-takers. Where have you been stopped or impeded by your thoughts? Making requests will get you out of that trap.

Consider what Teddy Roosevelt said:

“It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat.”

Blanken is a speaker, strategic scenario facilitator, and creative problem solver, creating learning experiences that transform organizations and individuals for 30 years. Her resource-ful™ executive coaching, leadership training and management development has propelled positive results at major corporations and associations.

