

MAYDAY!

ASKING FOR HELP IN TIMES OF NEED



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An Excerpt From

Mayday!:
Asking for Help In Times of Need

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Published by Berrett-Koehler Publishers

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INTRODUCTION

GETTING READY



Complain to one who can help you.

Yugoslav Proverb

When was the last time you needed help? Yesterday? This morning? Or was it months ago? When was the last time you deliberately asked for help to meet your needs? Can you even remember? Was your request fraught with so much nervousness and discomfort that there is no possible way you'll ever forget the experience? Or did the appeal come naturally to you?

Strong, independent, and capable people blanch at the thought of asking for help. Each might benefit from the energies of others as they envision new lives, create new goals, embark on new careers, and implement new plans. Yet asking for help is the last action they will consider. No matter how strong we are, most of us work incredibly hard to avoid placing a simple call for help.

For many, asking for help is up there on the list of dreaded activities, right alongside the fear of public speaking or going to the dentist for a root canal. Asking for help can reveal our weaknesses and vulnerabilities. It can bring up

unresolved issues of embarrassment and loss of control. It can test us like no other personal human challenge. Requesting help is so frightening that, even when faced with death, some of us will still not ask for that helping hand. There are those in the world who would, literally, rather die than let others know they are in need.

Yet, it's not usually life-threatening issues that we confront on a daily basis. Instead, we are consumed with smaller, imagined issues. Every day, no matter where you go, you may experience a need—a need for help. It may manifest at home, at work, at the park or grocery store. Need comes to us in many ways, degrees, and forms. It may be as simple as having someone help you carry a box, or as involved as having a friend help you move house. You may find yourself requiring a hand with the household chores or revealing a new perspective for your company strategy. Or perhaps your need is truly profound; perhaps you need extra care during a time of illness or recovery. Maybe you just need a financial boost to get yourself back on your feet again after a streak of bad luck. The act of asking for help enables us to satisfy our needs, large and small, profound and trivial. Rather than waiting for it to grow in size or in significance, why not ask for what we need when we need it?

If we do find a way to send out a mayday cry, we often do it badly. Possessed by anxiety, our words become hesitant, clumsy, and inarticulate. Instead of clear, strong, and centered mayday signals, we broadcast garbled ones, bathed in static. That static is our fear. With so much emotional “noise” your potential helpmate may remember your fear and not your request.

Making that request, not knowing whether your plea will be rejected, is bad enough. But actually having to relinquish control and let another care for us can be equally disturbing and uncomfortable. For many, *accepting* help can be devastating to their fragile egos.



Some see *asking* for help and *accepting it* as two completely different circumstances, but asking for and receiving help are closely aligned. The worries and concerns that prohibit us from doing either are exactly the same. One reason why some refuse to ask for help is because they know they'll have to accept it! Not only that, if we don't ask for help, it may be forced upon us. Trying to avoid making the request doesn't protect us from feeling that we will be viewed as weak, or that we will have to give up something in return for the help, or that we will lose something or someone if we take what is offered. Asking for help and accepting it go hand in hand.

The Mayday! Process

There is a way to lessen your fears of asking and receiving help. It is called the *Mayday!* process. Composed of seven steps, this model will allow you to send out a different kind of mayday signal. Rather than one complicated by fear, *your call for help can be delivered from a position of strength, centeredness, and clarity of mind and heart.* The seven steps are:

Before the Request

1. *Name the need:* Here you will learn about getting clear on your needs. You will also read about how important it

is to remain unattached to your first guess for resolving them.

2. *Give yourself a break:* This step asks you to apply the powerful emotional state of self-compassion to your situation. You will never be able to freely ask for help unless you believe you deserve it. This step helps you understand your personal worth and encourages you to ask for what you need.

During the Request

3. *Take a leap:* This step supports you as you get ready to ask for that helping hand. Confidence that comes from faith is powerful enough to change your body as well as the words you use to form your request. With this vigorous emotional state in place, you will have the self-assurance necessary to take a leap of faith toward the help you seek.
4. *Ask!:* This step requires you to do it, to make the *ask*. The chapter that describes this step includes practical tips and suggestions for making your request a successful one.

After the Request

5. *Be grateful:* Gratitude is a life-altering emotion. It changes how you view your circumstances. It shifts your focus toward your good fortune and away from what may be wrong. Gratitude allows you to remain gracious and open regardless of the answer to your request.

6. *Listen differently*: Once you've made your request, your only task is to listen carefully and completely to the response from your helper. This step explains why it is important to listen differently, not just to the words, but to the underlying emotional messages embedded in the response.
7. *Say thanks*: The final step of the *Mayday!* process is to say thank you—whether your helpmate agrees to help you or not. Say it, mean it, and say it again. Your helper will appreciate your gratitude.

Each step requires you to breathe deeply and consider both yourself and your helpmate. Awareness of yourself and others is essential to make this process work. In addition, the steps are more effective if you understand two anchoring principles. Both take advantage of the unappreciated power of our emotions. We have a tendency to ignore the emotional field, to dismiss our feelings. In doing so, we neglect to appreciate the ability of emotion to motivate us to act and to change our perceptions.

The anchoring principles will provide you with better insight into the concept of Applied Virtue. AVs are super emotions that will change you, your life, and your calls for help. Our fear wants us to believe one reality: that asking for help is too risky and not worth the energy. Applied virtue will show you a different reality: that the benefits of asking for help far outweigh the unlikely risks.

Application of these seven steps will lead you to experience a newfound stability and strength. They help you discover a sense of calm that will turn asking for help into a declaration of your value as a person, not just an acknowledgment of your frailty as a human being.

The Forgotten Benefits of Asking for Help

Why should we bother asking for help if it is so much trouble and causes so much fear? There are benefits that we have forgotten, that have lain buried beneath our egos and our fear. Need blinds us to what is possible and present right now. The act of asking for help reveals what we cannot see.

The moment we decide to make a mayday call, we trigger a transformative energy that shifts us from the status quo into the realm of possibilities. We start on a journey toward a better future. When we ask for help, there is a greater chance that we will not be alone on that journey. Each request for help will serve as an invitation to share life for a while.

The act of asking for help is not only an invitation, it is a declaration, an assertion that we are deserving of assistance. When we venture to ask for what we need, we learn quickly that we are not alone and that there are resources, friends, and partners available to help. Asking for help can also re-introduce us to the beauty and inherent strength of gratitude.

Probably the most obvious reason for crying mayday is that we might just get help. This can lead to a life of greater simplicity and ease. You might even have a better chance at achieving “work/life balance,” the holy grail of men and women everywhere who work and desire a life, too.

Reaching for that helping hand also stretches us beyond our current comfortable existence. It leads us into new and unexpected conversations and situations that test us and make us grow. Who knows what will happen when we present the question, “Will you help me?” We set in motion a series of events that few could have predicted. We automatically change our future from one of predictability to one of possibility.

More than anything, our mayday calls transform our

relationships by illuminating the emotions that lie just below the everyday surface stuff of life. Our requests create the potential for new connections where there once were none. At the same time, they can deepen existing bonds and even destroy others. It proves to us that we are deserving of help, that we are not alone, that we are already recipients of countless blessings.

Getting Ready

You are about to embark on an emotional journey, a process that may challenge you in different ways. Decide now to be open to the activities, questions, concepts, and principles. Doing so will make your trip a bit smoother. The following visualization may help you get started.

If possible, spend the next few moments preparing yourself for this journey. Sit quietly in your chair. Pull your shoulders back, opening up your chest cavity, and breathe. Allow yourself to take at least three full breaths, holding each at the top until you feel your heartbeat. When your body wants your breathing to return to normal, let it.

Imagine that you are boarding a boat or ship of some kind. The destination is still unknown, but that doesn't concern you. You are ready for an adventure. Move forward to the bow of the boat and find a seat. Feel the soft lurch as the ship leaves the safety and familiarity of the dock. See before you a horizon of sunlight, sky, and blue waves. Feel the anticipation inside you as the boat moves ever forward.

Shift your attention to the lightly white-capped waves. They advance toward you ever so slowly. Each swell represents a lesson about asking for and accepting what you need. Instead of fearing them, feel curiosity about what it is they

will bring to you. As you learn, you will ride, even surf, each wave. You will attempt to find your balance and keep your ship upright. You will also experience pleasant relief as your vessel survives the surge that accompanies each lesson. Some waves will be bigger than others, some will feel imperceptibly small. All of them have value to you.

Now breathe again, gently pulling yourself from this vision.

Asking for help is often our last resort, but it doesn't have to be. Your mayday calls don't have to be drowned out by desperation. Instead, they can be anchored in self-respect, confidence, and gratitude.

CHAPTER I

WHY WE DON'T ASK



The significant problems we face cannot be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we created them.

Albert Einstein

Asking for help is a universally dreaded endeavor. We often choose instead to continue on alone, struggling valiantly and often unnecessarily with day-to-day burdens or even with crises, convinced that asking for help would exact an emotional price too high to bear. Nonetheless, in a world where people are living longer than ever before and may need ever more support over time, reliance on others has become increasingly necessary. It is time that the universal signal of mayday is sent.

No one is immune from need—not CEOs, not the cleaning staff, not store owners nor the store clerks. Grandparents, parents, and children all require a boost at some point. Team leaders and teammates, coaches and players, teachers and students, presidents and citizens all must, at some time, ask for aid.

Yet so many of us resist. One can't help but wonder, if we all experience need, why it is so hard to ask for another's help in

satisfying that need. What parents wouldn't want their child to come to them with a problem needing resolution? What loving spouse wouldn't want to be called upon to support her partner? What leader would prefer to be kept in the dark if a team member needed help? There comes a time in everyone's life where we can't move forward unless we rely on others. The people who know and love us *want us to ask*. Yet we ignore our need. We pretend that we'll get through on our own, and in the process, deny the frail reality of our humanity.

Too many of us would rather go it alone when help is available . . . just for the asking. Something stops us from asking, but what, exactly, is it? A number of reasons are valid—to a point. What follows is an overview of the pressures that prevent us from asking for what we need. Each reason either muddies our mayday signals or stops us from sending them at all. When that happens, we lose more than we realize.

We Were Never Taught How

Children are taught early to share their toys and treats. We regularly remind them—and ourselves—that it's right and polite to share with others. As self-involved little kids, we might hesitate to offer our toys and cookies, but after a while we see how pleased mom and dad look when we do. As we grow older, we begin to give generously because it feels good and not because it is expected.

Coming from a large family of nine children, I have early memories of "helping" around the house. We had our chores of course, but we were also expected to help one another, most of all the young ones. Regardless of how annoying my little brother could be, my duty was to hold his hand and guide him.

Sharing is important, no one argues that point. We may not notice, however, that as we teach our kids how to share, we inadvertently teach them other lessons as well.

When we encourage children to share, we acknowledge their position of abundance, whether it is a full plate of cookies or just more life experience. We also unintentionally point out that a difference exists between the two children: one has something, the other does not. A new, and uneven, power structure is established. The one blessed with abundance is usually the one with the power to decide what happens next. This unequal arrangement is fairly obvious to everyone involved; even the children may sense it.

Sharing is, and always will be, an important lesson to teach. But little time and energy have been spent advising us what to do when we are burdened with need or in a position of lack. Where are the lessons that teach us the best way to ask for what we need?

We encourage our kids to come to us when they need our help, or to seek out school counselors or trusted teachers. Encouragement is often where the lesson stops. Few of us explain how to ask, and fewer still describe why we should. No one learns to ride a bike on his own, and few people learn how to ask for help without someone to show them how.

The seemingly simple act of requesting help is more complex and less easily taught than our simple and frequent lessons on how to share. Thankfully, it is no less complicated than other lessons we learn along the way about personal honesty and integrity. Consider this book your new primer on how to make requests for what you need!

We Have Few Models

We sometimes learn important lessons in life from stories containing models or archetypes. Classic tales like *Little Red Riding Hood* or *The Three Little Pigs* contain universal examples of acceptable and safe behavior. These archetypal stories and characters communicate images that are immediately

recognizable and representative of the human condition. Passed down from generation to generation, they convey common and valuable truths.

Perhaps the greatest advocate of the wisdom of archetypes was Carl Jung, the renowned twentieth century psychologist. Jung examined archetypes extensively and theorized that they represent not only recognizable images, but also a shared human psyche. “The collective unconscious—so far as we can say anything at all about it—appears to consist of mythological motifs or primordial images, for which reason the myths of all nations are its real exponents. In fact, the whole of mythology could be taken as a sort of projection of the collective unconscious.” If true, then archetypes instruct us at a very basic level about our own humanity.

Another of my teachers, Caroline Myss, author of the remarkable best seller *Sacred Contracts*, uses archetypes to illuminate the personal journeys we all take. A convenient and helpful *Gallery of Archetypes* is included at the end of *Sacred Contracts*. From Addict to Warrior, Myss describes seventy of the more common archetypal personas that humans adopt. You have already lived many of these: Child, Artist, Athlete, Companion, Lover, Saboteur, Victim, and Warrior.

From Myss and Jung we learn that archetypes contain familiar stories that don’t just represent what we have in common; they also teach us great lessons about heroism, failure, and everyday existence. Was there an archetype that would teach us how to be vulnerable and still survive—how to ask for help? I began to search for a unifying and recognizable image that depicted a healthy approach to asking for help.

Those who ask for help are often seen as personifying the archetype of the Beggar. Caroline Myss describes it well; “Completely without material resources, the Beggar is associated with dependence on the kindness of others, living on the streets, starvation, and disease, whether in New York City

or Calcutta.” Clearly, the Beggar is not an image we usually want to emulate as we transmit our own mayday calls.

Or is it? Myss goes on to describe the Beggar in all of us; “People ‘beg’ for attention, love, authority, and material objects . . . From a symbolic perspective, the Beggar archetype represents a test that compels a person to confront self-empowerment beginning at the base level of physical survival. Learning about the nature of generosity, compassion, and self-esteem are fundamental to this archetypal pattern.” When we ask for assistance, we do learn a great deal about generosity and the impact it has on our self-images. But these lessons are *indirect* consequences that come from acting out the Beggar archetype. The Beggar does not *directly* teach us how to ask for the help we need.

Perhaps ancient Greek mythology is able to provide a direct and positive model to show us how to ask for help. One story, in particular, seemed to demand a request for help, that of Demeter, the Goddess of the Earth, and her daughter, the beautiful Persephone. Ruthlessly kidnapped by Hades, the God of the Underworld, Persephone is separated from her mother. Realizing her beloved girl is gone, Demeter begins a frantic search that lasts for days. She finally goes to Zeus, her brother, and demands that he tell her where her daughter is. He refuses and Demeter in retaliation and grief, essentially, goes on strike, causing the fields of the Earth to lie barren and the rivers to dry up.

After reading a number of variations of the story, I wanted to shake Demeter’s mythological shoulders and yell, “You fool! Why? Why didn’t you just ask for help?” How could Demeter not know that people do not respond well to demands, especially mythological gods?

Another archetypal story is that of the Good Samaritan. The Bible tells of a man, brutally robbed and left for dead by the side of a road, who is helped by a stranger—a citizen of

Samaria. (For a sharply witty and thought-provoking study of this parable, read *Help: The Original Human Dilemma* by Garret Keizer.) As inspiring a story as this is, the Good Samaritan allegory contains lessons about giving help, not asking for it.

The Bible contains a number of instances of people beseeching God and Jesus for help. Some of the requests for help are implied, as in the story of Lazarus who was raised from the dead. Martha, Lazarus' sister, came to Jesus to inform him that her brother had died, but she did not directly request Jesus' intervention. Other stories, as well, have clear and straightforward pleas for help. In Mark 5:21, Jairus said to Jesus, "My little daughter is critically ill. Please come and lay your hands on her so that she may get well and live." And in Mark 7:24 a Canaanite woman approached Christ and "began to beg him to expel the demon from her daughter." In both cases, Jesus responds with compassion and healing.

Finally! Positive examples of requests for help! Jairus and the Canaanite woman both demonstrate that heartfelt pleas can be made and answered!

As affirming as these tales are, they still don't seem to fit as unifying and easily recognizable images. Quick! What comes to mind when you hear the word Beggar? More than likely you get an immediate image of a bedraggled person. Use the word in conversation and the other person will immediately understand your meaning. Now describe what comes to mind when you hear the words Jairus or Canaanite woman. More likely, your mental response is a blank one. How interesting that these affirming models have not made it into our cultural lexicon, while the negative model of Beggar has. Sadly, there seems to be no universally accepted and immediately familiar image that represents a person blessed with enough self-care to respectfully and clearly ask for what he or she needs.

In a workshop examining the three feminine archetypes, Virgin, Mother and Crone, I approached Jean Shinoda Bolen, Ph.D. and author of *Goddesses in Everywoman* and *Gods in Everyman*. We discussed my search for relevant archetypes. After some thought, Dr. Shinoda Bolen shook her head. "I'm not aware of any archetypes that support asking for help . . . but," she added, "If we don't have the model, we sometimes need to create our own." What an inspiring perspective! Perhaps one day, we will all serve as models for those who desperately need and want to ask for help.

We Love Our Independence

Contemporary society has its own share of archetypes and models that dissuade us from asking for help. The iconic images of the United States celebrate the independent ideal: the lone cowboy, the business magnate who succeeds because of his own strong will and refusal to quit, and most recently, the super mom who raises her kids and simultaneously seals the multimillion-dollar deal. The classic American archetype is one who finds his own path and succeeds: Bill Gates, Thomas Edison, and Henry Ford. In film, we celebrate the power of the individual through characters played by strong, self-determining actors like John Wayne, Bette Davis, Katharine Hepburn, and Orson Welles. As a nation and a culture, we've been living with and promoting the dream of independence since 1776. Perhaps we've gone a bit overboard.

An offshoot of our love of independence is the value we place on the individual. In his work on defining national cultures, social scientist Geert Hofstede identified five key dimensions, one of which assesses a nation's tendency toward individualism or collectivism. Hofstede writes, "On the individualist side we find societies in which the ties between individuals are loose: everyone is expected to look after him/

herself and his/her immediate family. On the collectivist side, we find societies in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, often extended families (with uncles, aunts and grandparents) which continue protecting them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty.” Not surprisingly, the United States outranks all other nations—by a wide margin—on measures of individualization. One person, one vote; MySpace pages; personal playlists; personalized marketing, and the rise of the small, independent business owner—each is a testament to how much we value the individual.

Independence and individualization generate great stories of self-determination, but they can also lead to very lonely and isolated lives. Robert Putnam, author of the revealing *Bowling Alone*, cites startling statistics that bring to light the consequences of a culture driven by a relentless search for independence and personal self-expression. According to Putnam, in the last twenty-five years social capital, or the “ways in which our lives are made more productive by social ties” has dwindled. Attendance at club meetings is down 58%, involvement in church activities has dropped anywhere from 25 to 50%, and simply having friends over to the house has decreased by 45%. According to the December 4, 2006 issue of *Time Magazine*, “the number we count among our closest friends—the ones with whom we discuss important matters—shrank over the past 20 years, from three friends to two. At the same time, the number of Americans who have no one at all to confide in more than doubled, to 1 in 4.” Troubling statistics that make asking for help more unlikely.

We have pulled away from one another. We have left behind many of the support systems that we once relied upon. This gradual separation from the whole contributes to and reinforces our natural reticence to ask for help. If we don’t feel part of something or connected to others, then we reduce

the number of potential helpmates. Stepping off society's dance floor keeps us believing we are alone, that no one is there to dance with us. Haven't we had enough of being alone and pulling ourselves up by our individual bootstraps? Have we gone too far with our infatuation with personal independence? Aren't we ready to get involved with each other again?

We Don't Think To Ask

Brainwashed by the lure of independence and individualization, many of us have created singular lives that are grounded in self-sufficiency. So caught up in the habit of taking care of ourselves, we lose sight of when we might even need help!

Pam was, by all conventional measures, successful. She had an important position in her company and lived in an exclusive neighborhood in the city, but she was lonely and feeling the weariness of doing everything on her own. I offered her an assignment that had been given to me years before: Ask for help three times a day.

Pam couldn't do it. She struggled each day to come up with opportunities that would require her to ask for help. After a while, she forgot all about it. She slipped back into her routine of handling everything on her own.

Like Pam, many of us have become so habitually self-sufficient and compulsively busy that we have driven out all thoughts of asking for help. We have created lives that can be handled, for the most part, by one or two people. We'll never invite another in to help if we have become inured or oblivious to our needs.

It's Easier to Do it Myself

Making a request for help is often hard. Asking for help requires a level of emotional risk and some are just not ready

to take it on. For them, it is easier to find a way to soldier forward without assistance. Even if the emotional hurdles are overcome, accepting help might be more troublesome. Involving someone else would be more work/trouble/agonies/aggravation/effort (take your pick) than it's worth.

Rudy, a somewhat successful artisan glass blower, found it too difficult to ask for help around the studio. He began working with glass when he was in college in the late '60s. He found he loved the creative process and over the years developed a signature style. There were times when he was so busy creating beautiful works of art and managing his small studio that he would have appreciated help, but Rudy just couldn't bring himself to ask. "It's not me," he told me once. It was easier for him to limit his time in the shop and get to the bookkeeping when he could.

During busy periods, when his glass was in demand, Rudy made the decision to work longer hours and to "be more efficient." Essentially, the emotional risk of asking for help caused Rudy more stress than working harder and longer. It was the trade-off he was willing to make. He's not alone. Every day, many of us decide that it's easier to handle it all ourselves rather than ask anyone else to help.

Rudy traded more than he realized. Working longer hours and trying to be more "efficient" took a toll on him. He was always unhappy and stressed during these peak periods. He would become resentful and impatient. He would pull away from his family. He never seemed to be available for important outings and events. Rudy never figured out how to get more done in less time. His strength was in blowing glass, not in balancing the books. If he had braved his fears and asked for what he needed, office help, he would have been free to create and to be with his family more.

Then there was Elaine, who ran a small restaurant. She resisted asking her staff to learn how to handle inventory and

ordering, telling herself that it would take up too much time and that there would be too many mistakes made along the way that would cost her money. Elaine couldn't see what she was really giving up by doing it all herself. Her staff didn't hang around long. They would work for a few months and then leave for better jobs at other restaurants that offered them more opportunity to develop their skills. The ones that did stick around weren't the most motivated employees. They came, did their jobs, and left. After a while, Elaine found herself overworked with an unwilling staff.

Refusing to ask for what we need can be shortsighted and limiting. Sometimes asking another for help does create more problems than it resolves, but our assumption that it will play out that way is not always correct. We won't know until we make the request. Refusing to ask because we cannot control the end result does nothing more than imprison us in the way we've always done things. Choosing to go it alone can prevent us from using our energy in activities that inspire and ignite our imaginations.

We're So Bad at It

Let's recap for a moment. *If* we do realize we need help, *and* we've never been taught how to ask for it *and* we've never really seen a good example *and* we have been discouraged by society, that would probably mean we are pretty bad at performing it. At the risk of sounding vulgar—no wonder we suck at asking for help.

Any teacher or corporate trainer will tell you that the way to develop a skill is to marry step-by-step instruction with a successful demonstration and then follow it up with practice. Until now, we've had no formal instruction on how to ask for help, and what we've seen and experienced are probably really bad examples. We've had our share of humiliating

attempts. So we stumble on alone, convinced we just need to think it through some more. Avoidance, denial, and delusion rarely work, and they certainly don't lead to success when we have a need to meet.

If we are finally forced to ask—and this is usually when we've hit a point of desperation—our requests stink of that same despondency. We mess up our requests. Our mayday signals become garbled. If we go to the trouble of asking for help, we want to make absolutely certain that our requests are heard and understood. The less confusion we create when we ask for what we need, the better for us and for those who agree to help.

From experience, we know many things can go wrong if we make poor requests for help. Some consequences are embarrassing, all are miserably unpleasant. Here are some common ones:

- ◆ We may ask too late because we don't recognize early enough that we actually have a need to be filled.
- ◆ We may not see the whole picture, so the help we ask for satisfies only part of our need.
- ◆ We may ask the wrong person or people to help us with our request.
- ◆ Our requests may be so unclear that others may not understand that we need help at all.
- ◆ Help may come, but because we weren't clear enough in our requests, it's the wrong help.
- ◆ We may demand assistance rather than politely ask for it.
- ◆ We may resort to blackmail, bribery, or even coercion to get our needs met.

- ◆ We may inadvertently solicit pity instead of help.
- ◆ Our bodies may betray our fears and subtly send the message that we are too far gone to be helped.
- ◆ We may ask for help too often without concern for our friends, family and co-workers. Compassion fatigue becomes a real possibility for them.
- ◆ We may simply frighten ourselves into never asking.

Like any skill, practice is required. The more often you ask, the more comfortable you will become. With time, miscommunications will be reduced, anxiety will lessen, and your words will become more eloquent.

The Law of Reciprocity

You may have never heard of the Law of Reciprocity, but you have adhered to it most of your life. It means to give and take mutually; an exchange of one favor or action for another of equal value. This rarely discussed, but general rule obliges us when we are on the receiving end of a generous act of help.

When we hear the following expressions, we know the Law of Reciprocity is at work: Treat others as you would yourself; Quid pro quo; Scratch my back and I'll scratch yours; Tit-for-tat; and Give-and-take. Even the concept of Karma, which states that the energy you put out into the Universe will return to you, is another manifestation of this law. When we find ourselves in a situation where we need aid, the Law of Reciprocity comes into immediate effect. Almost instantaneously, we wonder, "If she agrees, how can I ever pay her back?"

The Law of Reciprocity also prevents us from abusing our relationships by asking for help too often. It forces us to pause before we make our requests, giving us a moment to consider

others and their needs. This universal rule is of great value, yet we can temper our use of it. Applied without care, the Law of Reciprocity could make our lives one tit-for-tat transaction after another. You do for me and I'll do for you. How cold! How mechanized! Adhering strictly to this law, would we begin tallying debits of need and credits of support?

My very good friend Vivian and I decided to drop this transactional way of assisting one another. We came to this decision during a shared vacation. On a trip to Ireland, I decided to arrange for top-drawer hotel accommodations for Vivian and myself. I thought that it would be a lovely way to experience the famous Irish hospitality and to pamper ourselves for a day or so. Over champagne that first afternoon, Viv confessed she was having a hard time figuring out how to pay me back for my generosity. I shook my head, laughed, and told her that some gifts are simply just gifts. They are not to be "paid back." For Vivian, this was a new way of looking at how we could care for one other and keep our friendship alive. We agreed from that point forward that we would learn to give without expectation of a return. This has naturally extended to how we help each other as well. When one of us needs something, we no longer worry about the cost of the assistance. We trust that our friendly give-and-take will balance in the long run.

Indeed, some acts of assistance are far too great to pay back, such as saving a life or providing care during a time of great illness. Who could even begin to think about repaying our parents for the guidance, love, and aid they've given us over the years? Placing a value on these selfless gifts is impossible. On a day-to-day basis however, our requests for help are not usually so great and overwhelming. Even if the Law of Reciprocity kicks in, you have the power to make a deliberate decision to override it. You can give yourself permission to ask for what you need.

Fear

We have many reasons why we don't ask for the leg up or the helping hand—all valid. But at their core, each reason is an acceptable way of explaining the *fear* we feel about asking for help. Of course, you might not use the word *fear*. Instead, you might find yourself feeling *concerned* or *anxious*. Regardless of the semantics, some degree of fear holds you back from broadcasting your mayday signals. In its not so subtle way, fear tells you that asking for help is wrong, that you'll suffer more if you ask. Don't believe it. In the next chapter, we'll expose fear for what it is and reveal the hidden truths that it doesn't want you to hear.

TRY THIS WHAT STOPS YOU FROM ASKING?

Writing your responses serves to reinforce your own personal learning. Every **Try This** question and activity is available online at www.maydaythebook.com. I invite you to access the site to record your answers, thoughts, and musings.

- ◆ How far has your love of independence gone? What have you gained from being self-sufficient? What have you lost?
- ◆ When do you find it's easier to "do it myself?" How does that decision affect you in the short term? In the long run? How else could you spend your energy?
- ◆ In thinking of your failed requests for help, what went wrong? Refer to the lists in Step 6 for possible answers to this question.
- ◆ How have you "paid back" someone for his/her help? When did you not ask because the emotional or financial price seemed too high?

this material has been excerpted from

Mayday!:
Asking for Help In Times of Need

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Published by Berrett-Koehler Publishers

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