

The 11 Key Elements of an Effective Request

Committed Speaker – You must be committed to what you are asking for; others can see or sense when you're not committed. Commitment also lives in the body, so check in with your body before making a request and ask the question “Am I committed to what I'm about to ask for?”

Committed Listener – It's the speakers' responsibility to produce a committed listener. So, is the person you are asking “multi-tasking”, or do you have their full, undivided attention? We know when we have a committed listener and when we don't.

Example: In our world today, we often make requests via e-mail. Sending an e-mail does not guarantee a committed listener and this is a breakdown. What can you do to produce a committed listener via e-mail?

Something Missing – What is missing that we need to ask for in our request? We make a request because we believe the future will turn out different than the way we would like it to.

Specific Future Action – What exactly is it that you want me to do? Often we have been vague with the action we desire (“more support”, “help with this”). We must spell out exactly what we want or the person listening will fill it in for us.

Example: Will you please create the report on blue, 8 ½ x 11 paper, double-sided, with the following columns, in this order and with the following totals by noon tomorrow?

Conditions of Satisfaction – For me, these are often included in #4 above. A question to ask is “What are the conditions I want to see in order for me to be satisfied?” This often helps me create the specific future action in my request.

Shared Background of Obviousness – Often we have lived, or worked, with one another long enough that we don't have to spell everything out. We can say what we need to say in fewer words, or using acronyms and the person listening knows exactly what I am asking for.

Example: Honey can you take care of the kids today? And, your spouse knows “taking care” means specific action such as getting them up and dressed, feeding them, making sure their homework is done and taking them to school.

Time Frame – Specifically when do you want it? We must be specific here so the listener knows clearly when it is expected.

Example: This Friday, May 5 at noon as opposed to “sometime Friday” or “as soon as possible”.

Emotions – What is the emotion or mood you bring to the request, and equally important, what is the emotion or mood of your listener? Emotions and moods predispose us to act a certain way, so they are critical here. They are also interpretive structures, so they influence the way your request is listened to or heard.

Trust – Do you trust the person you are making the request of? If not, then there is really no point in gaining a promise from them as you don't expect it to be kept.

The mode – What are the actual words you use to request? Some examples are: I ask, I beg, I order, I suggest, I beseech, etc.) Since language is generative, each of these can produce a different 'listening.'

The context – What is the context in which the request is taking place? If we say the words "I suggest that you do...", it is listened to differently depending on the context. If the context is love and support it is listened in a very spacious way. If the context is one of authority and obedience, it is listened with narrow possibility to say no.