

# NEGOTIATION STRATEGIES

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## REQUESTING VS. DEMANDING A KEY TO PERSUASION AND INFLUENCE



■ Raphael E. Lapin

**I**n the workplace, we constantly require something of our co-workers, employees or team members. This may involve them improving their performance, making change or perhaps doing something beyond their call of duty. Often we present our requests in a way that the other party perceives as a demand and they silently (and sometimes not so silently) resist, and our efforts are likely to be frustrated. To greatly improve our chances of eliciting a productive response and action, we must present a request rather than assert a demand. The components of a request are that it be positive (stating what we do want as opposed to what we don't want), specific, doable and respectful. In this column, we will guide you through these components so that you will be able to achieve strong results through effectual requests.

### Being Specific

The first step when you need to make a request is to think very carefully about what you want or need of the other party and be very clear and precise in your own mind. Then, in making the request, you should be as specific as possible. Let's say you have a team member who never contributes in team meetings. You would like him/her to be more participatory. An ineffective way of communicating this would be: "I would prefer that you not be so passive in meetings" This is ineffective because you have communicated what you don't want rather than

what you do want, which has given them no direction for what they need to do to improve. "I would like you to participate more in meetings" is an improvement but not yet optimal because you have not told them specifically what you expect from them. An optimal request would be: "I would like to hear at least two meaningful comments from you in every project meeting". By being specific and framing your request positively in terms of what you do want, you have communicated a clear directive that they can implement.

### Making it Doable

When you make a request, be sure that it is realistic, and does not violate their needs, constraints, authority or ability. A poignant example is the approach of the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa in the 1970's. They did not adopt a slogan of "no more apartheid" because that would not be

making it doable, present it as a respectful request and not as a command, demand or ultimatum. This will allow the other party to accept it while saving face. Let's say a coworker habitually stops by your office to chat and interrupts your work. Saying "Stop barging in here unannounced and wasting my time" will make them feel disrespected, rejected and defensive. Even if they cease their behavior they will not do it gladly and will continue to bear an inner resentment. A more respectful way is: "I would love to chat more but I must complete these assignments. Would you like to continue this after work?" Another example is rather than to make a demand such as: "you better get that done or else!" you could respectfully ask: "Would you be willing to do that for us?" The content is similar but the phraseology makes all the difference.

Whenever you need to ask something of the people that you work with, take a few mo-

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doable with the long history of apartheid in South Africa. Instead they made a request that was doable, which was "free Mandela". Consider an example where you have decided to decrease the use of paper in your office to save the forests. Asking employees to stop using paper and to do everything electronically is a request that is not doable because there are times that hard copies may be necessary. A more doable request would be to ask them to develop a policy of when to use electronic copies only. You have now made a request that is realistic and doable.

### Requesting Respectfully

People need to feel that they are being treated with respect. When making a request, in addition to being specific and

ments to think about how you will phrase your request. Ask yourself: Is it a demand or request? Am I requesting something very specific and framing it positively? Is it doable? Is it respectful? By putting your requests through this simple test before presenting them, you will dramatically increase the likelihood of them being well received and accepted.

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