

What Form of Help Do You Seek?

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“Hey, you got a minute?” How many times do you hear that in a given day?

The question is clearly a request for help. As a servant leader, you feel obligated to provide encouragement and support.

So, you interrupt whatever you are doing and focus your attention, hoping it will only require a minute (or less!). Of course, it rarely does! So, you listen, and you provide the requested help.

Let me encourage you to pay attention to the various requests you receive in the next couple of weeks. See if you observe these same three categories.

“Bail me out!” help. This request often comes from someone who is stressed. The individual is usually in some trouble and needs to improve the situation quickly. Maybe somebody made a bad choice, or there’s been an unexpected change in plans, or circumstances just turned sour.

If proper action doesn’t occur, the situation will likely get worse. The individual would have already taken the necessary action, of course, if he or she had the authority, or the skill, or the confidence.

Or maybe the person’s not sure what the proper action is. Perhaps the individual is facing a tough decision and is really asking, “What should I do?” Maybe it’s your expertise or your authority that the person is actually seeking.

Transactional help. This request occurs any time there is an explicit or implied “deal.” It happens a lot between neighbors: “I’ll fill your pickup truck with gas if you’ll let me use it to haul pine straw this afternoon.”

Professional colleagues often have implied agreements. One says, “Hey, will you help me think through this situation I’ll be facing tomorrow?” The other one knows that in a day or two, he’ll probably be making a reciprocal request.

Actually, most of our employment relationships fall into this category. “We think with your skills, you can help us on the night shift. Can you start Monday? We pay \$15 an hour.”

Transformational help. This is the kind of help that causes individuals and organizations to grow! A paradigm shift is typically involved. New insights empower individuals to make their own decisions and accomplish their own desired outcomes in the future.

The person is forever changed for the better. And the organization is improved because of the presence of a more skilled individual.

I invite you, as a servant leader, to elevate each request for help to the transformational level. How do you do that? When the person describes the help needed, reframe the outcome being sought.

The person making the request clearly has an objective. Could you possibly satisfy not only what is desired, but also empower the person to be able to perform better in a similar situation next time? Consider extending the interruption a few more minutes and teach an appropriate principle.

Could you ask the person to consider an expanded situation—something more complex—and then think with you about a generalization? How about delegating some related responsibility to the person, knowing that future situations will arise that he or she could productively handle?

If you are successful in providing this kind of transformational help in just half the instances, you can significantly reduce the frequency of future interruptions. At the same time, you’ll build the confidence and competence of your workforce!

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