

Off the Shelf

The Healthy Habit of Asking For Help

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“Mayday! Asking For Help in Times of Need”
by M. Nora Klaver, published by
Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

Considering the fact the *Exchange’s* audience is primarily male, and any psychologist (or female) will tell you most men have a fundamental block against asking for help, “Mayday! Asking For Help in Times of Need” by M. Nora Klaver, really had to do a sales job to qualify for ink in this publication. Sold.

My observation is that the successful in this industry are those who have created a network of support. Those who chat with others online, carve out phone time with peers, attend shows and classes—in short, those who practice asking for help.

Even the all-male lineup of ERE columnists have been playing the funeral dirge for status quo throughout the last decade, and Klaver points out one obvious solution for surviving change—calling on the wisdom of others.

Granted, she does delve into some touchy-feely areas that may make those who experienced the in utero testosterone wash a little uncomfortable. But if you hang in there she has some solid advice that may help you move forward in your business and personal life.

Klaver explains in the preface that the English word mayday actually comes from the French “m’aidez” which trans-

lates “help me.” This international distress call used by ships and aircrafts is associated with those circumstances when mortal danger is imminent.

She goes on for a full third of the book explaining why, in life and business, we don’t naturally ask for help, why we should ask for help, and how to prepare to begin the discipline of asking for help. Then she explains how with the Mayday! process.

Klaver does concede that many times we are burned when approaching others for advice or aid, and points out why our requests sometimes tank:

- We don’t realize we have a need until it’s too late.
- We don’t see the whole picture and therefore don’t ask for adequate help.
- We ask the wrong person.
- We don’t ask politely, even resorting to bribery or coercion.
- Our fear stops us from asking or frightens those we are approaching.

Fear? You may insist you are not afraid of anything but death and taxes, but once you read about the different emotions which mask themselves as fear—some of them very masculine—you just may recognize yourself.

She writes: “Remember, fear, by its very nature, seeks to deceive. All fears try to convince us that the status quo is better than moving into the unknown. It doesn’t want us to see the possibilities that exist just beyond our sight.”

Naming the fear is her first, non-negotiable step to a solution.

For the visual learner, Klaver explains the Mayday! process repeatedly with diagrams throughout the book. Every few pages include a “Try This” section with

assignments to implement the action points listed in the previous paragraphs.

And when you’re still not convinced her psychological mumbo jumbo has merit, she hits you with several pages discrediting everything you are thinking. For example, here are some common myths she says our John Wayne-infused culture has taught as gospel:

- Myth—Asking for help makes you look weak or needy.

Reality—If you are human, you have needs. Asking for help is a sign of strength.

- Myth—Asking for help signals incompetence, especially at work.

Reality—Seeking help at work shows that you want to do the job.

- Myth—Asking for help means the job might not get done right.

Reality—Refusing to ask for fear of losing control won’t result in positive change. You may even learn that what you thought you wanted is not the best solution.

- Myth—Asking for help means you’ll have to return the favor.
- Reality—Help freely given comes with no strings attached.

- Myth—Asking for help just isn’t the American way.

Reality—All great enterprises, including our nation, were built on support, teamwork and collaboration.

If the Mayday! process does nothing else, it highlights the importance of being intentional in our interactions with others, calling on the wisdom, insights and experiences of those around us before it’s too late.