

HELP, I NEED SOMEBODY

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I am a big fan of asking for help. For years asking others for help has saved my bacon; getting me to places I otherwise wouldn't have found, getting me out of holes I would have languished in and enabling me to understand things that, in different circumstances, would have baffled me.

But increasingly I realise how many find it hard to ask for help. We might know people who would rather double the length of their journey than wind down their window and ask for directions. Others would rather soldier on half the night clearing up, stacking chairs, washing dishes on their own rather than ask for volunteers. And Christian leaders suffer from this as much as anyone, needing help and not asking for it.

WHY NOT ASK FOR HELP?

So what's going on? Why is it that so many people find it difficult to ask for help? I guess there are a number of reasons:

- Many people live in fear of potentially upsetting or troubling others. What happens if they take offence at my request or they feel obliged to help when they don't want to?
- Some people would much rather just get on with it themselves, making sure the job is 'done well'.
- And for some it never even occurs to ask for help or, worse, they haven't realised or admitted to themselves that there is a problem which needs help in the first place. To ask for help sometimes means admitting that not everything is OK and that is a big step.

But perhaps one of the most common reasons is this: that many people see asking for assistance as a weakness or as an embarrassing sign of their lack of knowledge and skill and few want this. Leaders, and particularly leaders in a new post, want to show others that they were wise to appoint them, that they can do a 'good job'. It is all so understandable.

But the irony of it is that, more often than not, asking others for help is a display of great strength. It shows the strength of initiative (who can I ask?) and humility (this may make me look stupid or lazy or unimaginative) and flexibility (to be able to deal with whatever response we receive). From a leadership point of view, it can be an opportunity to empower others, and to develop others' gifts and confidence. And, of course, it can be an act of vulnerability which is scary. But, as an old friend of mine always used to say, 'to stay creative in life we should do a scary thing every week!'



A PARADOX

As a leader, there is a paradox (one of many leadership paradoxes) in the business of asking for help. We want to show others that they can have confidence in us, that we are able to do the job we've been called to; and yet we also want to demonstrate a level of vulnerability which shows others that we need them and trust them, and which builds relationship with them. It's a matter of balance between these two things – and that balance may be different for different people we interact with.

Jesus could have been a 'one man band' but he chose to use the most fallible of humans to join him in his work and was never ashamed to ask for help ...

Think, for example, of the practical help he requested in setting up for the last supper or the water he asked for from the cross, or for the company he asked for in the Garden at Gethsemane. It is this vulnerability which warms him to us, which makes him fully human. And he asked for help directly in his mission, sending out disciples in pairs for them to grow and learn, and to produce a team equipped for kingdom work in the future. And God still today shows the same trust in you, me and everyone he calls to be involved in his work in the world.

I'm not saying that we should become lazy and always ask others before we've thought about an issue ourselves. Sometimes it's important to just get on with a job, but equally there is something quite special that happens when we become vulnerable and ask others to help us. We empower others, and recognise that they have gifts and skills or time that we might not have and in doing this, we build up the body of Christ and are richer as a result, to say nothing of the piece of advice or practical help we have benefitted from.

It is not about becoming a church of indecisive disciples, and abrogating responsibility, but about having an eye for an opportunity to invite others in, whilst always respecting the 'noes' and 'not just nows'.

I work in a diocesan office and I'm always surprised by the relatively small number of clergy who choose to ask for help or who ask too late. And it's a sadness because asking for help is welcomed and can open all sorts of doors for a parish. If only clergy knew.

Asking for help flexes our humility muscle, achieves far more in the long run, reduces the chances of us being bottlenecks, helps us realise that we are not alone in what God has called us to and reminds us that there are often creative solutions that we've not thought of. What's not to like?

TWO-SIDES

Lastly, remember that there are two sides to this equation and, amazingly, God has made a world where most people actually quite like to help. They feel blessed when they think they've helped others and it builds relationships. How win-win is that? And surely the same is true with God too. We know he loves it when we turn to him for help.

So next time you think you're going to go under with the volume of things you have to do or the weight of pastoral care which seems to have fallen to you ... don't hang around. Ask yourself where you can go for help.

Brother, sister, let me serve you
Let me be as Christ to you
Pray that I may have the grace
To let you be my servant too.



FOR REFLECTION

- What are the things that stop me asking for help?
- Is there an area at the moment where I'd be better off if I asked for help?
- What would my colleagues, family or close friends say if I asked them to pinpoint one area where they felt I could do with help?
- How do I view other people when they ask me for help?
- What can I ask God for help with today?