

MEANINGFUL LEADERSHIP NEWSLETTER

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THE LANGUAGE OF LEADERS, PART II - REQUESTS

WELCOME TO THE MEANINGFUL LEADERSHIP LEARNING LABORATORY

REQUESTS: We make them every day.

“Will you take out the trash before you leave for work?”

“Will you get that report from Karim’s office?”

“Will you drive the kids to school today?”

At home or at work, **requests** reside at the heart of conversations that empower action. Welcome to Part Two of our examination of **The Speech Acts**.

A **request** is an action made in language (and body). We’ll talk about body in another segment) that creates a **future** that would not have existed previously. You ask: Will you marry me? Whether the answer is yes or no, **you have created a future** that would not have existed had the request not been made. Requests propel future action, and action is what makes things happen:

1. Requests lead people to make “promises” to fulfill on them.
2. Promises made and fulfilled build trust and forward critical action.
3. Promises made and broken breach trust and cost people and organizations time and money and heartache.
4. A declined request leaves the person asking in a position to complete the action herself or in need of asking someone else.

If you slow down each of these processes you can see that many many of the breakdowns that occur between human beings begin with an unexamined understanding of what is happening when making a request of another person.

So, **what’s in a request?** If requests beget action and leaders are in the business of causing people to take action on behalf of a mission, don’t you think it would make sense that we apply the rigor and distinctions that can have our requests be potent, effective, efficient, and inspiring?

Take some time with the questions below. **Take your own leaders’ inventory** here and let us know what you see for yourself. What new actions you will be taking as a result of your reflections? »

“Our success in life is directly proportional to our ability to make requests of other people.”

Former CEO of Coca Cola.

The Anatomy of a Request

A request must include:

- A speaker and a listener
- A shared understanding of the request being made
- A time by which the request must be fulfilled (This is one element of a request we often miss and it creates a huge amount of wasted resource.)
- Clear conditions of satisfaction

Do you make powerful requests of others who are in condition to fulfill on that request?

Do you ever make a request of someone who you know is not really able to fulfill?

Do you make requests of those competent to fulfill, but whom you know will not because they chronically over-promised?

If you make the request and you know they won't fulfill, are they responsible for the breakdown or are you?

Do you make requests no one listens to or takes seriously?

When you make requests, do you get a clear promise back from the other person with clear conditions of satisfaction (meaning that you clearly state what will have you say that the request has been fulfilled)? If they take the kids to school at 11am, is that fulfilling on your request?

Do you make requests that cause people to go beyond who they currently know themselves to be?

Do you make requests that empower others to be greater than they currently are? Do you make requests that lead people to have to discover something new?

What requests do you accept again and again that you ought to be declining?

What requests do you decline to make that, if you made, would force you to grow?

Enjoy the inquiry!

Warmly,

Jen Cohen

For further inquiry:

Promise-Based Management HBR April 2007.pdf

You are What you Say by Mathew Budd

“Understanding Computers and Cognition: A New Foundation for Design”
by Terry Winograd and Fernando Flores

“You must give birth to your images.
They are the future waiting to be born.”
—Rainer Maria Rilke