



Requests

A Speech Act

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

Requests, we make them every day. “Will you get that report from Karim’s office?” “Will you drive the kids to school today?” “Will you ask Mary if she spoke to her client yet?” At home or at work, requests reside at the heart of conversations that empower action.

A request is an action made in language (and body) that creates a future that would not have existed previously. You ask: “Will you marry me?” and 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.

For example:

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 deconstruct each of these processes you can see that many, many breakdowns that occur between human beings begin with an unexamined understanding of what is happening when making a request of another person. So, what *is* in a request?

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.

Assess Your Requests, a Leaders' Inventory

Since requests beget action, and leaders are in the business of causing people to take action on behalf of a mission, let us apply the rigor and distinctions that can have our requests be potent, effective, efficient, and inspiring. Take some time with this Leaders' Inventory below.

- 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 on it?
- Do you make requests of those competent to fulfill, but whom you know will not because they chronically over-promise?
- 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)? E.g. 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 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?
- What new actions you will be taking as a result of your reflections?

The Speech Acts: *the Declaration, the Request, the Promise, the Assertion and the Assessment* are at the crux of our communication with one another. They are the primary currency of all organizations, all teams, all families, all countries. Aware or not, we use The Speech Acts – the name Fernando Flores used to distinguish the language moves we humans make every day to form conversations, and our world. And these conversations lead to actions that would not have been possible prior to speaking about them. It is well worth the time and attention to learn how to Master the Art of the Conversation.