

Ask Me

ANYTHING



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I've never been good at asking for help. If you ask my husband to tell you why, he will say it's because I am extremely stubborn. If you ask my mom, it's because I am an overachiever. If you ask my dad, it's because he taught me that the only way to get something done the right way the first time is to do it yourself. But if you ask me, it's because the thought of asking for help makes me extremely, extremely uncomfortable.

It turns out that I'm not alone. A quick Google search produced thousands of articles on the art of asking for help—and in all of the ones that I read through, the central theme in the first few paragraphs was that people, historically, have a hard time asking for help.

So why is this? According to social psychologist Heidi Grant, PhD, there is research in neuroscience and psychology linking the social threats of asking for help—uncertainty, risk of rejection, potential for diminished status, and inherent relinquishing of autonomy—to activation of the same brain regions that are activated by physical pain.¹

“And in the workplace, where we're typically keen to demonstrate as much expertise, competence, and confidence as possible, it can feel particularly uncomfortable to make such requests,” Dr. Grant wrote.

Yet, paradoxically, helpfulness is an innate behavior, psychologists and researchers have found.²⁻⁴ According to one series of studies from researchers at Cornell and Stanford universities, people underestimated by as much as 50% the likelihood that others would answer favorably to a direct request for help.⁴ The studies were conducted across a range of requests in both experimental and natural settings.

Perhaps it is because I've been lucky enough to mingle with some of ophthalmology's finest surgeons in highly supportive environments, but I get the feeling that asking for help in this industry is more the norm than the exception. At meetings such as the American-European Congress of Ophthalmic Surgeons, MillennialEYE Live, and Caribbean Eye, I have often listened with great interest to one surgeon asking another (or the entire audience) how to handle a complication, a tricky case, or a problem patient.

It was with that sentiment in mind that this month's cover focus was born. In “Ask Me Anything,” *CRST* set out to ask some of ophthalmology's top experts for help and advice on a variety of surgical situations, from handling a posterior capsular rupture or a white cataract, to approaching astigmatism correction or cataract surgery in a diabetic eye, to identifying poor candidates for multifocal IOLs or patients with dry eye disease, to managing unhappy patients.

There is something to be said about learning through your own experiences, of course, but learning through the expertise of others can also be mighty powerful. ■

1. Grant H. How to get the help you need. *Harvard Business Review*. May-June 2018. <https://hbr.org/2018/05/how-to-get-the-help-you-need>. Accessed September 27, 2018.

2. Tomasello M. *Why we cooperate*. Boston Review Books: Boston; 2009.

3. Kaplan HS, Schniter E, Smith VL, Wilson BJ. Risk and the evolution of human exchange. *Proc Biol Sci*. 2012;279(1740):2930-2935.

4. Flynn FJ, Lake VK. If you need help, just ask: Underestimating compliance with direct requests for help. *J Pers Soc Psychol*. 2008;95(1):128-143.

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