

# MAKING CLEAR ASKS

## Strategies to Collaborate More Effectively

As leaders, we are often moving so fast through life and work that we fail to invest the time needed to make clear, actionable and effective asks.

When overloaded, we often struggle to:

- Ask others to help,
- Articulate requests clearly,
- Ensure we make asks, not orders
- Calibrate if they were understood and accepted
- Foster accountability
- Align on timelines
- Negotiate when there is pushback.

Read on to learn the three steps to making requests even more clear.

Mastering the art of making clear requests is vital to communication, healthy relationships, and effectiveness.

## Asks are essential to Clear Communication

Clear communication is essential to effective collaborations.

Ideally, communication is bi-directional, fostering conversations and engaging a human connection.

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## 9 Steps To Making Clear Asks

It is essential to understand all the parts of making clear asks, invest in each step, and learn to be your best in order to make even clearer asks effectively.

- 1 Preparing thoroughly
- 2 Be detailed and specific
- 3 Confirm ask was received and accepted
- 4 Ask for alignment
- 5 Establish commitment and timeline
- 6 Build accountability check points
- 7 Track deliverables
- 8 Calibrate on results
- 9 Review and improve process

# Why We Fail To Make Clear Asks

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## Lack of clarity

- Poor communication
- Unclear outcomes
- No questions or clarification process.
- Stacked resentment and disappointed with the results

2

## Lack of capacity

- Poor time management
- Under or ill-prepared
- Priorities misaligned
- Chaos/crisis management (too much on their plate, chasing projects)
- Unresolved bottlenecks
- Constrained bandwidth (too many demands with not enough time, energy, or attention)

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## Lack of competence

- Inexperienced
- Think it is “easier to just do it” themselves
- Feels the ask is “too complicated” to explain

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## Lack of trust or relationship (low trust)

- Fear of being too prescriptive, over-dictating process, or micro-managing
- Fear of overstepping boundaries
- Lack of work/life balance
- Lack of support (don't have the right team)
- Generational differences
- Blowups (people get frustrated)
- The wrong person doing the work (too expensive/not the best person)

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## Lack of emotional intelligence

- Avoid conflict or “putting someone out”
- Assume their team is already too busy
- Don't want to be “bossy” in asking
- Fear of resentment
- Expect others to read their mind
- Assume others won't do it well or right

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## Lack of communication

- Poor results and failures stack over time
- Stress stacks
- Frustrations mount, resentment builds, collaborations erode

## Communication breakdowns when

- Unclear outcomes
- Orders not asks (Uni-directional)
- Not accepted
- No one is accountable
- Time necessitates others “taking over”

## There are stacking consequences when asks fail

- Without clear asks, the consequences begin to stack up.
- Frustrations mount, resentment builds, collaborations erode
- We are often too busy and invest too little in our growth—leaving us behind, stressed, and ill-prepared.

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## The BENEFITS OF MAKING CLEAR ASKS

- Becomes a form of self-care
- Makes it easier to anticipate and plan
- Establishes expectations and boundaries
- Creates an opportunity for growth
- Forces you to get even more clear on outcomes
- Increases likelihood of follow through and results
- Creates replicable and streamlined processes
- Helps you get organized (agendas, templates, more successful meetings)
- Clear outcomes promote creativity and flexibility on the approach
- Engages others in desired results.
- Provides enough specificity that others are set up for success
- Avoids being overly specific in ways that others might feel micromanaged, disengaged, or undervalued.

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## Mastering the 3 PHASES OF MAKING A CLEAR ASK

### Phase I: Before the Ask

#### Invest in relationships proactively

- Engage with key stakeholders not just when you need things.
- Understand who you are working with
- Build Rapport - Invest time in knowing the person you are asking:
  - ▲ Who are they, what matters to them, where do they thrive, what do they want?
- Determine the right way to ask for the right situations (via in a meeting, email, or one on one in person).

#### Prepare fully

- Be Specific
- Identify expectations: What, by when, on what budget, by what standards
- Identify outcomes, success criteria, including all the parts/subparts
  - ▲ Specify timelines, budgets, and parts/subparts
  - ▲ When possible, provide examples
- Consider the following questions when crafting your ask:
  - ▲ What must it have?      ▲ What are nice to haves?
  - ▲ What can't it have?      ▲ What is needed to be successful?

## Phase 2: During the Ask

### Make The Ask

- **The What**
  - ▲ Be specific and detailed
  - ▲ Establish clear expectations - Detail exactly what you want and how you want it done. Don't assume any detail is too small or what the other person should already know.
  - ▲ Spell out specific conditions of satisfactory behaviors
- **The Why**
  - ▲ Share the purpose
  - ▲ Include why the ask is this important, why it's a priority, why are you asking them, provide context.
  - ▲ The 'why' of something often helps the ask come with a less weighted value. It can clarify why certain deadlines are important when they seem arbitrary.
- **The Who**
  - ▲ Engage stakeholders in conversations
  - ▲ Gives - In making your ask, attend to what you can give to them. (The more you know the individual involved, the more successful you will be in doing this)
  - ▲ Identify/Assign a point person to take charge when delegating to a team.
  - ▲ Do you have the Right people with the Right skills for the Right task
    - Get Altitude
    - Assume positive intent
    - Engage People
    - TRUST The more trust you have, the easier the ask will be
    - Set people up for success

### Engage a Response

- **Asks are bidirectional**
- **Alignment about the Ask**
  - What is heard/accepted?
  - Even the most-clear requests will fail without agreement/commitment
  - Interacting is vital to ask questions, make counter asks and negotiate
  - Fine tune each interaction: what was said vs what was heard, what was understood, what is needed to be successful, etc
  - Calibrate on stakeholder experience
  - Clarify all parameters
- **Solicit Confirmation: Yes, No, or Negotiate**
  - Ideally, this includes agreements about steps/subcomponents.
  - Establish timelines: What will be delivered, by when and how
  - Define specific deadlines, milestones, and check-in times.
  - Foster Accountability

## Phase 3: After the Ask

### Execute on the Ask

- Offer Autonomy whenever possible: what decisions can they make
- Build a habit of checking in, calibrating, and continually refining and improving your capacity to make clear asks
- Check-in on the What, How, and Who
- What: Task/Deliverable (what worked, what could have worked better, what did we learn)
- How: How could that have been easier, better, more fun, more aligned?
- Who: How was our communication, expectations sharing
- Below the surface: We are building trust
- Know how to calibrate quickly/often when breakdowns occur

### Complete the Ask

- Ideally there is a collaborative conversation upon the conclusion that reflects backwards to plan forward.
  - What worked, what could have worked better, what did we learn
  - What should we try next time
  - Exceptional collaborations are built on good habits, clear expectations, deadlines, deliverables.
  - By When - Clear Accountability (what, how, by when)
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# AIM PROCESS



## ENGAGE

- Appreciate that clear asks are important.

## AWARENESS

- Where are you making asks effectively?
  - ▲ What are you doing well? What is working?
- Where are you struggling with making asks?
  - ▲ What is not working? What are you avoiding?
- Where do you need to make more asks? What gets in the way?
- What contributes to interpersonal breakdowns or conflicts?

## ACTIVATION

- What is the most important area to focus on to improve your asks?
  - ▲ List subparts (Pre-ask, etc)
- Identify two important asks and walk through all 3 stages
- Build a daily habit of tracking what asks you are making, where they are clear, and how they could be improved.

## AGILITY BUILDING

- Engage with more diverse types of ask to different people.
- Reflect on asks and solicit feedback.
- Follow-up/closing actions: What worked well? What could have worked better? What did I learn?

## ACCOUNTABILITY

- What you permit, you promote.

## INTEGRATION/ACCELERATION

- Examine how relationships, productivity and impact changes with clear asks.

## KEYS TO SUCCESS

**REMEMBER:** Effective asks require a bi-directional interaction. Invest time to proactively develop relationships, clarify the ask, and ensure they are in alignment.

Please share where you are experiencing "wins," how you are making better asks and any questions with us at [info@aimleadership.com](mailto:info@aimleadership.com)

Set up a time to talk to the AIM Leadership team.  
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