How to ask for help at work

Even a rock-star employee (ahem, that's you) can use a little assist sometimes. These savvy tactics make it easy to send out an SOS without feeling like a total loser.

By Araina Bond

Drowning in your cube? Raise the white flag. No one's gonna judge you for it.

Your worry	Why you shouldn't sweat it	What to say
People will think I have no clue about what I'm doing.	You'll come off as *more* flaky if you keep quiet and struggle instead of requesting some direction. But keep it simple: Ask a manager to double-check your first-draft memo—*not* to write it for you. Seeking a second opinion is wise.	Lead with something like "I've pulled together some solid ideas for this project." Then go in for the ask: "Do you think you could take a look at my plan?" You want to emphasize that you've got things under control, advises Garret Keizer, author of *Help: The Original Human Dilemma.* Practice out loud a few times. See? You sound totally capable.
All my coworkers seem so busy. I'd hate to be a pain.	We underestimate how willing people are to help us, a study from Columbia University notes. When we work with others, reward centers in our brain light up, which feels good, *PLOS ONE* finds. Plus, by asking, we give them license to show off. Can't hurt!	Acting sheepish won't cut it. Instead, be upbeat in your approach—and toss in a compliment, says Sara Laschever, coauthor of *Women Don't Ask.* Go with "I love the way you think on your feet in meetings—you have such great insights. Could you brainstorm with me for five minutes?" You'll seem likeable and make her feel good.
I want to prove I can handle a project solo.	Here's the key to looking totally competent even when you haven't got your bearings: Make it clear that you need help with only one *teeny-tiny* thing. (You have the rest covered, thank you very much.) Nobody's going to doubt your skills, we swear.	Avoid blurting out something generic, such as "I'm dying here—can you help?" Instead, your request should set boundaries from the get-go: "Would you mind eyeballing the numbers in this section of my report?" After you get what you need, retake the reins with a friendly "Thanks so much for that. I'll go finish things up!"

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