

Ask for What You Want

A practical guide to turning small asks into bigger opportunities



PAY IT FORWARD
with
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Furgeson

There's a piece of advice I come back to more than almost anything else:

Ask for what you want.

I don't remember exactly where I first heard it. I once looked it up, thinking it might have come from Oprah, but I couldn't confirm it, and I haven't followed her in years. It's just one of those things that's out in the universe. I didn't make it up. What matters is that I actually took it to heart, and I keep finding new places to apply it.

This guide is about that habit: what it looks like in practice, why it's harder than it sounds, and how a handful of small, specific asks have quietly reshaped opportunities in my own life.

Where the fear comes from

For a long time, I was afraid to ask for things. I worried about being embarrassed, or being laughed at for wanting something I wasn't ready for. That fear is easy to justify in the moment. Staying quiet feels safer than risking a no.

I don't know if it's age or experience that's made me bolder over time, but somewhere along the way, asking stopped feeling risky and started feeling obvious. Here's the reframe that did it for me:

"ASK FOR WHAT YOU WANT. WHAT'S THE WORST THAT CAN HAPPEN?"

If I ask and the answer is no, I'm exactly where I started. I haven't lost anything. At least I tried. If the answer is yes, I've gained something I wouldn't have had otherwise.

Small asks, bigger outcomes

I've seen this play out more than once, and each time, the outcome went further than the ask itself.

Last fall at Intuit Connect, I told someone at Anchor that I wanted to be featured in *Elevé* magazine. I didn't know if I fit the profile they were looking for. I figured the worst they could say was no, and I already had that. So I asked. And it happened.

More recently, I asked an online community I'm part of to host their user meetups more often. At the time, they were only happening once a quarter, and I wanted to see them monthly. They turned the question back on me: "Well, do you want to host it once a month?" That wasn't exactly what I'd asked for, but I took the opportunity. Now I'm the one hosting those user meetups, and I was recently asked to serve as an advisor-in-residence.

Neither of those outcomes was something I set out to get. They came from asking for something smaller and staying open to what came back.

Teaching it early

This is the piece I try hardest to pass on to my kids, because I know firsthand how long it took me to learn it. I tell them to approach things this way whether it's asking for a promotion, a new job, or something as small as asking a restaurant to make a dish that's not quite on the menu. You just have to ask.

General guidance: bringing this into your firm

The following is general best-practice guidance, not attributed to Melissa Miller Furgeson. It's offered as one way firm owners might apply the "ask for what you want" mindset in day-to-day practice.

The instinct to stay quiet rather than risk a no shows up constantly in firm ownership: asking a client for a referral, asking a partner for a clearer role, asking a vendor for better terms, asking for the engagement you actually want instead of the one that landed in your inbox. In each case, the same math applies. A no leaves you where you started. A yes moves you forward.

**"A NO LEAVES YOU WHERE YOU STARTED.
A YES MOVES YOU FORWARD."**

None of these require a script or a formal pitch. They require deciding that a no is tolerable and asking anyway.

A simple script for asking

"I wanted to ask directly: [what you want]. I know it might not be possible, but I wanted to put it out there."

Pitfalls to avoid

Waiting for the "right" moment

There often isn't one.

Assuming you need to be fully qualified first

Melissa didn't know if she fit the profile the magazine was looking for. She asked anyway.

Treating a different answer as a rejection

When the online community offered her a hosting role instead of just a more frequent schedule, that wasn't the ask she made, but it was worth taking.

Only asking for the big things

The habit gets easier to use when it's practiced on small, low-stakes requests too.

Keeping the habit to yourself

Passing it on to kids, a team, or a colleague is part of what makes it stick.

How to apply this in the next 7 days

Exercise

- DAY 1–2** Identify one thing you've been putting off asking for, at work or otherwise.
- DAY 3** Write down what would actually happen if the answer is no. Notice that it's rarely as costly as it feels.
- DAY 4** Make the ask, using a direct, simple version of the script above.
- DAY 5–6** Look for one small, low-stakes opportunity to practice the same habit.
- DAY 7** Share the mindset with one other person, whether that's a colleague, a family member, or a team member.

Summary - At a glance

- *The core idea: ask for what you want, because the worst outcome is simply staying where you are.*
- *The reframe: a "no" costs you nothing you didn't already have. A "yes" moves you forward.*
- *The proof: a magazine feature, a community hosting role, and an advisor-in-residence title all started with a single ask.*
- *The habit: practice it on small things, not just big ones, and pass it on to others.*