

The FOUR-Mula
For
Asking For What You Want
And
Affirming What You Have!

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The FOUR-mula for Asking For What You Want and Affirming What You Have

Materials needed before beginning:

1. Handouts
2. Writing utensils (pens are preferred over pencils)
3. A writing board (could be blackboard, flipchart, white board or overhead projector)
4. Tape or CD player with some soft, peaceful background music on tape or CD.
5. A watch or clock
6. Two or three small prizes (a book, a poster, a plant)

Begin by reading or saying something like this:

Welcome to this workshop on caring and honest communication. Today we're going to practice some new skills with each other in a safe environment. Not only will we learn some life-changing new ways to communicate, we're also going to have some fun. Please let us know if you need anything or have trouble hearing what's going on. In short, ***ask for what you want today*** so we can facilitate your learning this practical and powerful material. *(Here is a good time to let them know where the restrooms are, if refreshments will be served afterwards, etc.)*

Are there any questions? *(pause 5 seconds)*

All right, then, let's begin:

In the 1970's, two psychotherapists went around the world to find the happiest people in towns and villages from 33 different cultures. They then studied these extremely happy people to find out what they had in common.

They found out that the key to happiness they all shared was a four letter word.

Women tend to guess that this key is what? *(have class guess)* Most guess LOVE, and the men tend to guess that it's what? *(have class guess)* Golf or Cash? None of those is correct. The psychotherapists found that what set the happiest people apart was RISK! People who take risks tend to be much happier and thus healthier than those who "play it safe."

We're going to ask you to take some small risks with each other in this session. We find that people tend to get out of this session as much as they put into it. In other words, the greater the risk, the greater the reward you'll take home with you.



With that in mind, please pull the sheet entitled “What I Need Right Now” (HANDOUT #1) from your packet. In a minute, we’re going to ask you to complete it. Be as honest as you can be, understanding that no one will make you read or share what you have written at a later time.

Let’s do two quick examples of what your answers might look like:

For number 1a, one gentleman wrote “I need more self confidence.”

For 1b, he wrote, “That would look like telling people what I want without embarrassment.”

For 1c, he wrote “I could let them know at work that I’m interested in applying for the new manager’s job that’s come open.

For number 4a, one woman wrote, “I’d ask myself for more patience.”

For 4b, “The behaviors or outcome would look like not yelling at the kids before school.”

For 4c, “I could have the kids lay out their school clothes the night before.”

If you don’t know an answer, it’s okay to just guess. Any questions?

Okay, take a minute to complete the page.

(Here wait three or four minutes, then announce:)

One more minute.

(after a minute) Thank you! Did you learn some things about yourself through this activity? *(Listen to one or two answers)* Most people do. What this exercise offers is a form of journaling. Journaling is simply writing down what’s on your mind or in your heart. It’s a very powerful awareness tool. We cannot enjoy getting what we want until we know what we want. What’s so easy is that you can journal anytime and anyplace, even on a napkin at a restaurant. Getting what’s inside you out is truly healthy and helpful.

Does anyone here journal? *(if yes, ask them to share an insight or suggestion for incorporating journaling into our lives.)*

The one rule that we suggest for journaling is, “Do not share your journal with anyone.” Keeping it private helps you to be completely honest with yourself, which is a requirement before you can be completely honest with another person. You can put your journal in a safe, locked place, or simply let family or roommates know it is “off limits,” whichever you feel will work best.



Any other-questions about journaling? (*For times ' sake, keep this discussion to one or two minutes. Refer more extensive questions to after the session concludes.*)

Great, then let's move on.

In a recent seminar for parents and teens, the parent group was asked to cite their biggest frustration with their teens. "They won't talk to us" was the most common response. When the teens were asked for their biggest frustration with their parents, they replied, "They won't listen!"

The seminar instructor got them together and taught both groups the skills we're going to practice today, **How To Ask For What You Want and Affirm What You Have** in 4 simple steps. The teens were able to ask their parents to listen without advice or interruptions. The parents learned to affirm their teens for taking risks and sharing, and everyone came out a winner!

Let's start this skill off by asking each other some questions:

Q: Instead of just coming right out and simply asking for what we want, what are some less positive ways we have of letting someone know we're upset?

(Have them share their answers aloud. Answers will vary from pouting, to slamming doors, to whining and complaining, to yelling, to back-stabbing, to gossip and 3rd party communication, to put-downs, to quitting/divorcing/running way, to sarcasm, to the silent treatment, etc....)

Q: Which of these have other people used against you? And what was the result?

(Here take time for two or three answers. Point out that in the long run, none of these are win-win tactics. There's always a loser who will "get even" eventually. Finish with something like the following:)

Thanks for sharing. As we can see, none of these really make us or the other person any happier, and that's the point of asking for what we want, isn't it? So we can be happier!



Q: Next question: Why is it most of us don't just ask for what we want at home or work or school?

(Write 3 or 4 answers on the board for 1-2 minutes. Answers may include such reasons as, "They don't think they'll get it," or "They're afraid of hurting the other person or afraid of repercussions," or "Afraid their needs aren't important enough" or "They don't know how to ask without getting into a fight...")

Now let's spend a few minutes discussing some of these excuses. For example:

1. "We don't think we'll get it." We could respond: "How much of what we **don't** ask for do we get?"
2. "We're afraid of hurting the other person's feelings." We could say that that every time we vote we're hurting someone's feelings. Any time we say yes to something, we're saying no to something else. Everyone has boundaries; those places where we're uncomfortable with what's being asked of us. The only question is if we tell people about them, or keep them a secret and SURPRISE them later with the information that we were uncomfortable.

When someone responds negatively to a statement of ours the most important question is, "Was our intent to hurt, or simply to share honest feelings and thoughts?" One story tells of two brothers who were standing on the sidewalk arguing. The one brother exclaimed, "You're hitting below the belt!" The other replied, "You're wearing your belt around your neck!"

3. "We're afraid of repercussions." How might you respond? *(discussion)*
(You might summarize the discussion with) ☺ Let's remember we're not talking about **demanding** here, just asking. If you think your boss would fire you simply for **asking** for a raise, for example, you probably need to find a different boss. If you think your spouse/parent would hit you for asking, you need to get into a family or domestic violence support/recovery program. Healthy co-workers and family members may not like the fact that you're asking, (no one likes change except a baby in a wet diaper!) however, the chances are good that if you use today's skill and don't attack, they will respect you for taking the risk of asking.



4. "We always end up in an argument."

That's exactly why we're here today, to learn how to ask for what we want assertively without becoming aggressive! The total time it will take you will be about five minutes, and when you use the skill correctly, you'll find you're receiving about 90% of everything you ask for!

Remember: The definition of insanity is: "Doing what you've always done and expecting a different result," so we need to try something completely different. This four-mula (*hold up four fingers*) is so simple you'll hear your second grader start to use it on their older brothers and sisters. It basically looks like this: (*Write these on the board*)

PRESTEP: Got a minute?

1. When you _____
2. I felt a little _____
3. Because _____
4. Therefore I'd like _____.

(Then thank them for listening!)

Now, let's look at each step in detail...

How To Ask

STEP 1: AWARENESS: "When you _____,"

First we need to state specifically what we want to see changed. In this first step, we describe the facts of one very specific behavior that we would like to see start or stop, including the time and place it occurred. For example:

"When you called me at 5:00 to say you were going to be two hours late for dinner..." OR

"When you didn't return my call yesterday..." OR

"When I didn't hear any appreciation last week for getting the report out ahead of schedule..."

Notice the time is noted in each circumstance. That is because we can only handle hearing one - or at the most two - examples of grievances per conversation.



Q: What is wrong with these examples?

- a. "When you always leave your clothes in the middle of the floor..."
- b. "When we never go out on dates anymore..."

(Ask them for their answers)

A: They aren't specific enough. Words like "always" and "never" infer that the *person* is wrong, rather than that *the behavior* is not the best. If we want to get what we want from the other person, we can't close down their "ear-lids" with words like these. So remember to state the time, and if needed, the place where the thing that upset you occurred. Now, who wants to rephrase our two examples?

(Answer should be something like the following)☺

- a. "When you left your clothes in the middle of the floor today and yesterday..."
- b. "When we haven't gone out on a date for the past two months..."

STEP 2: ACCEPTANCE "I felt a little _____"

It's a huge risk to share our feelings. Yet it's worth it, because it's at the feeling level that we all connect with each other, not in our heads. The most important thing to remember for step 2 is to share two or three *feelings*, not *thoughts* (which tend to come out like judgments).

Q: What is wrong with these examples?

- a. "I feel like you don't care."
- b. "I feel that you are being disrespectful."

A: "Like" and "that" are not feelings.

Both a and b are thought statements, meaning you could replace the "I feel" phrases with the phrase "I think." In a true feeling statement where we share our sads, mads, fears and glads, this would not be true. For example:

- a. "I feel a little hurt and upset because..."

Using the phrase "a little" helps us stay in feelings (heart) rather than thoughts (head) because we would not usually say, "I feel a little that you don't care."

Q: What if we really feel very upset about something. Isn't it misleading to use the phrase "a little?" *(1-2 minutes of discussion here.)*

A: Actually, no. Part of why you are angry is the fact that in the past, you haven't made it clear to them what the problem was. We rage at people too often, and get angrier than the present situation warrants, because we're really mad at them for the present and the past. This is a turn-off for the listener, who is likely to get defensive and then start attacking us - thus we're into World War III.

Q: Has this ever happened to you? That someone used a present moment event to "vent" about things that happened a long time ago? What was the result? *(two or three minutes discussion here)*

(Conclude the discussion with something like this:) 😊

So it's best to stick to feelings in step two, and take the risk of sharing not only our anger, but also our hurt and vulnerability.

STEP 3: "Because _____"

Step 3 is important because we are all so different. We've heard the phrase men are from Mars and women are from Venus, but we're all unique because of our personality types and upbringing. Therefore, it is important to explain to the listener where our feelings are coming from in a non-threatening manner.

Step 3 only works if we give the listener the benefit of the doubt. Don't assume wrongful intentions (that they are out to hurt you). Here's one example of how assuming backfired on someone at work.

(have someone in the group act this out)

R: "Harry, have you got a minute?"

H: "Sure, Rosa."

R: "When you didn't say 'Good morning' to me this morning,

I felt a little hurt and upset

Because you say hello at lunch time, but you never seem to want to say Good morning to start the day..."

Harry's response was:

H: "Rosa, I'm really sorry. I'm deaf in my left ear, so I never hear you say good morning over the machines. I'll watch closer from now on."

Q: In this real life example, how do you think Rosa felt?

(1 minute of discussion, then end discussion with something like this:)

A: So it sounds like we agree that Rosa probably felt a little sad and embarrassed because she had mistakenly assumed that Harry didn't "want" to say good morning. Now let's move to the last step:

STEP 4: "Therefore, I would like _____"

In Step 4, our goal is to paint the other person a picture of what a solution would look like. A common example of not getting what we want is when a wife asks her husband to help more with the housework. An average husband will do more around the house after such a request, but he often will not do what she thinks is important. Then, when the important things (in her eyes) still aren't getting done, she ends up accusing him of not responding to her request and an argument ensues.

Let's take a look at another way of handling such a request:

(have two people from the class read the parts)

W: Honey, have you got a minute to sit down and talk?

H: Sure. What's up?

W: 1. When I got home yesterday after you were watching the kids and the dishes weren't done from supper,
2. I felt a little frustrated and disappointed,
3. Because I was exhausted from working all day, and having a friend over this morning, and I had a lot of extra work to do that could have been done last night.
4. Therefore, I would really appreciate it if you and the kids would do the dishes for any meal you eat when I'm not here.

Q: Did this example follow the rules we have set?

1. Was a specific time and place noted in step 1? *(yes)*
2. Were feelings rather than thoughts shared in step 2? *(yes)*
3. Was a non-judgmental reason shared in step 3? *(yes)*
4. Was a specific solution offered in step 4? *(yes)*

Q: What are the chances that she will get the help she needs from her husband using this method versus, “How come you never help around the house”? *(1 minute of discussion, then end with something like:)*

A: Of course, there could be other factors in his not helping, but in fact, most men, if asked in a non-threatening way, would want to help their spouses. As the bumper sticker says, “If Momma Ain’t Happy, Ain’t Nobody Happy!” The second example is definitely better than whining and nagging!

Let’s do two more examples: Say a 25-year-old daughter who lives at home borrows Mom’s nicer car a lot of weekend nights, but brings it home without any gas in it. Mom has been nagging her daughter (the old way) about gassing up the car. Use the new four-mula to talk to your 25 year old. *(Have someone use the 4 A’s four-mula to confront the 25-year-old. Stop them after each step to ask the group if they followed all the rules. Final product should look something like this)☺*

Prestep: Honey, have you got a minute?

1. When you brought the car home last night with the gas gauge on empty,
2. I felt upset and disappointed,
3. Because it seems like you’re taking advantage of the situation and not considering my needs,
4. Therefore, if you bring it home without at least ½ a tank again, you won’t use it for one month. Thanks for listening.

(If they answer “ask them not to do it again,” that’s too weak. Remind them that pain is required but suffering is optional. Other possible Step 4’s could be: If it happens again:

- you’ll have to pay me \$10 for a tank of gas,
- you’ll need to run three errands for me before you use it again, etc.)

We always have power. One single Mom was at her wit’s end because her 6’4” son had a second set of car keys made and therefore his Mom “couldn’t” stop him. She then realized her power, called two friends from her 12-step group, and when he went out to use the car the next morning, there were no tires on the car!



SO, WHY DON'T WE ASK?

Many of us have been told for so long that our needs were selfish, that many of us have pushed our wants and needs deep inside. I like to reply with this question: "Which of these activities is the most important, putting gas in your car or driving your kids to school?" Of course, both are important, but we must do one *first*.

Secondly, let's face it, it's easier to blame and complain than it is to take the risk of asking for what we want. So let's look at what we do instead of asking:

How to Stop Blaming and Complaining

Q: Are those people with positive attitudes usually the ones with:

- more energy or less?
- more success or less?
- more happiness or less?

(A: More of each)

Walk into any break room, and you can tell within minutes who is radiating positive or negative energy. The negative vibes are coming from those in **B.C. - Blaming and Complaining**. The positive energies are on the other side of the room dealing with the same challenges completely differently. They are choosing to **Act** (just do it, ask for what they want) and when they can't take immediate action, they **Dream**.

To move away from B.C. Living, we need to raise our awareness of what it looks like and what our alternatives are. One woman remarked to me after a seminar, "I've been told I was the 'most negative person' all my life by co-workers, family and friends. You're the first person to explain exactly what that means and give me some other options." Self-awareness goes a long way in helping make the changes we want in our attitudes.

Blaming: The Snake Made Me Do It!

Ever since Adam blamed Eve and Eve blamed the snake, the world has dealt with the effects of scapegoating. Stopping the Blame-Game is simple but not always easy. Just *don't* do it.

How often in business or at our church or synagogue do we hear, “My supervisor/this company/my pastor set this policy, there’s nothing I can do?”
(one minute of discussion)

The same is true for parenting. When Mom or Dad pull out their version of, “I had to or the kids would have made too big of a fuss,” they give up their own decision-making response-ability. When we make a decision because we believe and acknowledge it’s the right thing to do rather than because someone “forced us,” everyone benefits!

Complaining: How to Stop the 2nd Party and 3rd Party from Ruining *Your* Party!

Life *is* a celebration, but one experience that always turns fun to frowns is 3rd party communication. Whether in the workplace, at home, or with our friends, research shows that “Do-you-know-what-she-said-about-you?” communication can do more harm than any other single communication habit. Do you agree?
(one minute of discussion)

There are 3 ways to stop 3rd party communication:

- 1) Don’t start it
- 2) Don’t carry it
- 3) Don’t accept it

(carrier) Y

(sender) X

(receiver) Z

1) Don’t start it.

When you’re an X and you have something to tell Z, just find Z and tell them. Use the skills from the 4 A’s for Asking for What You Want we just practiced, and tell them honestly how you feel *without* throwing in a history lesson of how they’ve done it “forever” or other personal put-downs.

The reality is speaking your truth probably *will* help everyone concerned, and you probably *won’t* get fired. Once we admit this, our fears of success and getting what we ask for will surface, and we can see them for what they are: **False Evidence Appearing Real.**



2) Don't carry it.

When an X comes to you as a Y complaining about what Z did, simply say something like, "I hear what you're saying. Sounds like you need to talk to/ask them about that." There is no need for this statement to sound judgmental. Simply say it, then casually change the subject. If they give you excuses, refer to #1 A and B.

3) Don't accept it.

When you are in the Z role, be careful not to jump to conclusions as Y tells you the painful "truth" from X. There's a very good chance that Y embellished the story along the way (Y's are known for that.) Rather, keep breathing and use a statement like this:

"I appreciate your concern, but I'm sure X wasn't all that upset, otherwise they would have told me themselves. Maybe you just caught them on a bad day. In the future, please refer them to me as soon as you hear anything like this, rather than carrying their messages. Thanks anyway." (Then change the subject!)

Q: Do you think these three skills are realistic and practical? (1 minute of discussion)

A: Certainly, no skills can come with a 100% guarantee, but we have found that if these are consistently practiced, that it virtually eliminates 3rd party communication from being a problem in your life.

USING THE 4 A'S TO AFFIRM WHAT WE HAVE

Now that we've practiced the most challenging skill, the skill of affirming is easy! We simply use the first 3 of the 4 A's of Asking for What We Want like this:

Prestep: Have you got a minute?

1. **When you** stopped over to talk yesterday,
2. **I felt** great, really happy
3. **Because** I thought maybe you were mad at me because I hadn't called
4. **Thanks!**



Every major study in the past decade has found that what people want more of from their jobs is not money or benefits, but more recognition! The same holds true for relationships. We all want people to appreciate and affirm us.

Here is your chance to start the ball rolling.

Would anyone like to practice these out loud for all of us to learn from? Who's willing to take a risk *(If needed, let them know there's a prize for those who take this risk! Otherwise, just give out the prize after someone shares. Simply have one or two people use the 4 A's to describe an event that occurred in the past month where they felt appreciative of someone who did something nice. If no one offers after a minute or two, give them this scenario: How might you thank your co-worker for helping you complete something or clean up? Again, make sure they are specific:*

When you helped me yesterday, etc.)

Okay, let's review:

1. What is the end result of asking for what we want? (we get more of it!)
2. What is the result of getting more of what we ask for?
(comfort, reassurance, HOPE and GRATITUDE)
3. What are the characteristics of positive attitude people?
(see answer to question #2: Hope and Gratitude)

So for hope and gratitude's sake, for your sake, and for everyone's sake, start asking! And when you have something to be grateful for, say thanks!

Congratulations! You have completed the material on caring communication that has changed thousands of lives for the better! Please fill out the evaluation below to help us know how to serve you in the future. Thanks again for coming!



FOUR-mula for Asking for what you want

Using the 4 A's to Ask for What you Want

Before you make your request, remember to:

Be AWARE of what you want and need

ACCEPT that your needs are valid and real

ACCURATELY ASSESS that they cannot read your mind

ACT by asking if they have time to listen to you (If they are busy, simply set an appointment for later.)

Now you're ready to use the four-part phrase.....

- 1) **AWARENESS:** "When you_____ " (describe the facts of one specific behavior). In this step, use 'videotalk," or as Sgt. Friday once said, "Stick to the facts, Ma'am." Give the time and place of ONE behavior. If there were four people watching the event on video, would they all agree with the facts of your statement? If not, rephrase!
- 2) **ACCEPTANCE;** "I feel_____ " (use a feeling work)
Many times Americans like to begin opinion statements with "I feel" such as "I feel we should take another look at this." We do this because we know feelings are the most honest and open communication level and we want the other party to perceive us in that light. Therefore, stay away from phrases such as, "I feel like" or "I feel that."
- 3) **ACCURATE ASSESSMENT;** "Because I think_____ " (describe the thoughts behind your feelings). This is an important step in the process, because it lets the other person know your interpretation of the facts. Our thoughts determine our feelings, and in sharing our thoughts we let the other person know how we understand their motivation for behavior, and why we feel so deeply. We may be wrong! So be gentle with this step.
- 4) **ACTION;** Therefore, I would like you to_____ " or "Therefore, I am considering_____ " Here, we either propose an action we would like them to take, or one we ourselves are considering taking to resolve the situation. This is the actual 'asking for what we want,' but without the first three steps, the listener doesn't have a framework for understanding our request, and is less likely to respond cooperatively.