

Want to know how to get
everything you want?

just
ask



Think that big promotion...or the private time you crave...or the deep discount on that gorgeous sofa you've been eyeing is just going to magically happen? The heck it is! Here's how to speak up and get your needs met. by Jessie Knadler

WHAT'S ON YOUR SECRET WISH LIST? AN HOUR TO YOURSELF? HOTTER SEX? HELP MULCHING THE GARDEN? AND HERE'S ANOTHER QUESTION: WHY DO YOU KEEP THOSE DESIRES TO YOURSELF? ARE YOU (NOT SO) PATIENTLY WAITING FOR SOMEONE TO READ YOUR MIND? ■ "IT'S ALMOST EASIER NOT TO ASK FOR WHAT YOU NEED THAN TO HANDLE THE DISAPPOINTMENT THAT COMES WHEN YOUR NEEDS AREN'T MET," EXPLAINS DANA LIGHTMAN, PH.D., AUTHOR OF *POWER OPTIMISM*. ADD THAT TO THE IDEA OF CREATING TENSION OR INCONVENIENCE FOR THE PERSON WHOSE HELP YOU'RE ENLISTING, AND IT'S ENOUGH TO MAKE MANY WOMEN SUPPRESS THEIR NEEDS. ■ BUT GUESS WHAT: THE MORE YOU ASK, THE MORE YOU GET, AND THE MORE YOU REALIZE THAT CERTAIN THINGS IN LIFE MATTER ENOUGH TO GET GRABBY OVER. ■ BELOW ARE EIGHT BIG WISH-LIST ITEMS THAT AREN'T LIKELY TO COME YOUR WAY ON THEIR OWN—PLUS ADVICE ON HOW TO GET THEM! SO, C'MON ALREADY, GO AHEAD AND ASK FOR...

1 ...time for *yourself*

"I used to feel guilty for wanting time off from my kids," says Jeanne Cameron, 47, a recently divorced mother of four in Eureka, MT. "I'd also feel guilty when I was working and not spending time with them." Wanting a break from work or kids feels selfish. "Many women think it's their job to be there for everyone," says Susan Campbell, author of *Saying What's Real*. "Or we wait to be 'given' time off as a reward for all our hard work." But if you don't take that breather, you won't be there for *anyone*: You'll end up overworked, exhausted, and miserable—which is a lot more alienating and unpleasant to those around you than a couple of hours of "selfishness."

how to ask: "When I finally started to accept that I'm more than just a mother, wife, and worker was when I stopped feeling guilty for taking long walks by myself," says Cameron. "I realized I need that time to just be *me*." Besides, if you don't believe that you deserve some time off, no one else will, says Laurie Puhn, author of *Instant Persuasion*. Other than stating that you need the occasional break in order to be you, justifying your request is unnecessary. As a matter of fact, "quid pro quo bargaining with anyone—husband, colleagues, kids—such as, 'If you let me go shopping, I'll let you go fishing next weekend,' is ultimately self-defeating," explains Campbell, "since it implies that your happiness and contentment are contingent upon their giving it to you."

2 ...more *information* from your mechanic, your doctor, your loan officer

"I hate conflict," admits Lynn Donaldson, 35, of Livingston, MT. "Whenever I'd attempt to ask my old dermatologist a simple question about medications she'd prescribed for me, she'd bristle, as if I had no right to question her authority. I was so afraid of insulting her that I stopped going to her."

Sound familiar? You're "supposed to" trust a doctor's, a contractor's, even a store manager's expertise, so to question it seems like an insult. But by not asking, you never gain the knowledge you seek. The result: "You're left in a persistent state of dissatisfaction," says Joseph Somerville, Ph.D., president of Peak Communication Performance, a Houston-based firm that teaches professionals how to communicate more effectively.

how to ask: Put the focus on *yourself*, suggests Puhn. "Say something like, 'Let me see if I have this straight—you're saying that if I do ABC, then XYZ will happen?' You're appealing to the other person's ego by acknowledging their expertise and giving them the opportunity to correct you." If you still don't understand something, or if you feel stupid asking the same question over and over again, tell them that you'd like to write down what they say as they're talking. This way, they're forced to slow down and walk you through the info. (Bonus: You'll have notes to refer to later.) ▶



just ask

3 ...an orgasm

Okay, so it's not like you *never* have one—it's just that you want *more* of them. But because saying that can be awkward, or because you don't want to hurt your guy's feelings, you keep mum.

Then, there's that big misconception that great sex "just happens," notes marriage therapist Michele Weiner-Davis, author of *The Sex-Starved Marriage*. "You might assume it's something you shouldn't even *have* to talk about," she says. Wrong. Just like other aspects of your relationship, your sex life changes over time—so why leave each other fumbling around in the dark?

True, you may not need to orgasm *every* time. But when you don't, be sure it's for the right reasons (maybe *some* nights, just the intimacy of sex is enough for you) and not because, say, you're afraid of "taking too long." Know, too, says Weiner-Davis, that consistent dissatisfaction in bed will spill over into other aspects of your relationship.

how to ask: To psych yourself up, remember that "asking for more orgasms shows you want to enhance what's going on between you, instead of accepting the status quo," says Weiner-Davis. Wait until you're out of bed to bring the subject up, she advises. Zero in on what he does that you love (extended foreplay, cuddling) and talk your way toward the big O from there ("I think that if you do your special XYZ thing longer, I'd really love it"). By praising, not panning, his skills, you'll open a dialogue about how you can *both* increase the magic between the sheets.

4 ...a promotion

If you just keep toiling away at the office with a smile on your face, your boss will eventually notice and reward you with a fat raise and a new title, right? *As if!* The truth is, most bosses *prefer* a squeaky wheel, points out Linda Babcock, an economist at Carnegie Mellon University and coauthor of *Women Don't Ask*. In fact, much of the reason men still earn more than women is simply that they ask for more, according to Babcock's research.

how to ask: Assume that your boss doesn't spend much, if any, time thinking about your career advancement. Even if she *does* (and many good bosses do), acting as if she doesn't helps motivate you to get noticed. You'll demonstrate assertiveness and leadership—two promotable traits. Babcock suggests coming up with a list of all the reasons you deserve to move up: your productivity, the ways you go beyond the call of duty. Seeing your hard work on paper will boost your confidence and your case. Even if your boss turns you down, "she now knows your aspirations," says Babcock. "Ask her what exactly you have to do in order to be considered for advancement, and request to reconvene in six months. This way, you're involving her in the process." In the meantime, document your accomplishments so you'll have lots of evidence the next time you meet. *continued on page 156*

So what *do* you want?

It's all well and good to ask for what you want, but what if you're stuck in limbo because you don't *know* what you want, or because you want so much that you don't know where to start? Here, therapist Barbara Sher, author of *I Could Do Anything If I Only Knew What It Was*, helps you sort it all out.

■ **THE PROBLEM:** You don't know what you *like*—let alone what you *want*.

› **THE SOLUTION:** Write down what you *don't* want, whether it's too much TV time for your kids or dinner from a can every night. Now reverse those concepts: bike riding with the kids, homemade meals. Then, create a story based upon your dream scenario, and use the narrative to figure out ways to make your story happen. Maybe you'll realize that you'd rather have your babysitter prep

dinner for you in the afternoon so you're not rushed into serving frozen fish sticks again. Bingo.

■ **THE PROBLEM:** You don't know what you want because you want to start a book club...run a marathon...learn to invest—in short, you want *everything*. You're so overwhelmed by your mile-long list of desires that you end up doing *nothing*.

› **THE SOLUTION:** Realize that you have more time than you think. Write down your top 10 short-term

goals—organizing your closet, attending a book club meeting, running a 10K, whatever. Now, rate each "job" according to which ones you can devote yourself to this year; which ones you can do when your first picks are completed; which you can do for 20 minutes a day; and which you can do on the weekends. Mentally allocating your resources will give you a clearer picture of which desires represent your real passions and which are mere diversions.



5 ...better *service*

The rare steak you ordered looks like a burnt hockey puck. Your first thought is: "I don't want to cause trouble—more steak sauce, please." But remember: The customer is always right—and never is this more true than when it comes to what you are about to put in your mouth.

how to ask: Keep in mind that you're paying for food prepared the way you want it—or, at the least, the way it's supposed to be. "When I send something back, I tell myself, 'The waiter might not love me right now, but the restaurant owner will,'" says Amy Harrison, 32, of New York City. "I figure he'll need to know if his sushi chef can't properly prepare a \$25 plate of raw fish."

You don't have to adopt a diva attitude to get your way. Be polite but don't offer excuses (such as, "I don't usually do this, but..."), which only open the door for the waitstaff/management/bartender to push back. "I just say, 'Can I send this back? It's off,'" says Harrison. "'Off' is a hard word to challenge. Nine times out of 10 they get a concerned look on their face and take it away. If they don't, I tell all my friends never to go there."

7 ...a *discount*

You know that when you hit a flea market or a garage sale you're in Haggle City; anywhere else, you probably assume prices are fixed. But you'd be surprised how often you can get discounts if you just, yep, *ask*. "Vendors want to make the sale, after all," points out Puhn. Piping up before you pay up will yield one of the most tangible results you'll ever get for sticking your neck out: money in your pocket!

how to ask: Assume that the other party is used to wheeling and dealing, and make sure you have an answer ready in the event that they say, "No, that's not our policy." You can bolster your cause by drawing comparisons to other businesses and making it seem like you're an insider. For instance, you could say, "Most hotels have weeknight discounts—why don't you?" or "The last time I stayed at your other location, I was given a better rate." Ask about discounts or deals at hotels, car dealerships, gyms, spas, or anywhere that you're spending a large sum of money (such as on an entire furniture set: Say, "If I buy all three pieces, will you give me a break on the price?"). Even at restaurants and big national stores, you can make a pitch for a deal if the merchandise is damaged or you have a grievance with the food or service (see tip #5).

6 ...more *help* at home

Research shows that today's men do about 16 hours of housework a week, up from 12 hours a week in 1965. Sounds like good progress—except for the fact that women still log about 27 hours. "There's a sense that women should do it all—work, run a household, raise the kids—and if you can't, you're a failure," says Lightman. You may so resent that your husband and kids don't pitch in that you're incapable of asking them for help without a little edge in your voice.

Gale Wilson, 52, a mom of six who runs a family day care out of her Baltimore home, calls on her husband and kids to help her clean up at the end of each day. "Sure, I *could* do it myself, but it gets done faster with more hands," she says. Asking wasn't always easy. "I remember when one of my sons argued with me for 45 minutes when I asked him to sweep some steps," she says. "I resented that and felt exhausted after arguing. But I knew that if he got away without doing it, he'd get away without doing something else the next time I asked."

how to ask: Make your requests one chore at a time, says Campbell: "Statements like, 'Can I get some help around here?' are too vague; no one knows the task you're referring to, which makes you angrier." So if you need help with the dishes, don't go on about how "no one pitches in." Just ask for help with the dishes. They may gripe, and you may need to ask more than once—but isn't that better than *you* being on maid duty 24/7?

8 ...more *attention*

Chances are you feel you shouldn't *have* to ask for TLC from those who love you. "We all secretly want people to come through for us without us having to say anything," says Lightman. "When that doesn't happen, it feels like a rejection." But sometimes you just need more love, listening, or whatever than usual. And you've got to ask for it. Why? Because calling attention to your needs affects the overall quality—sometimes even the future—of the relationship. You're generating greater intimacy and preventing your relationship from slipping into autopilot.

how to ask: Say what you want at a time when you can get it—not when your guy is watching his favorite TV show or your girlfriend is crazed. Break your request down into specific, action-oriented moments, says Puhn: "Say, 'I love when you ask how my day went—it makes me feel good. Could you do that for me tomorrow?'" Focus on the power you gain by being the initiator in your happiness, adds Lightman: "If you want more love from your husband, don't wait for him to surprise you with flowers. Establish the pattern—ask if he'll run away with you for the weekend." Getting what you want in life—love, a career, happiness—is entirely in your hands. It may not always be *easy*, but it's definitely simple: You need only ask. ☐