

English at Work

Episode 21: Don't panic!

Language for asking for help



Narrator: Hello, welcome back to Tip Top Trading where everyone is gossiping about Paul's announcement that Anna is to lead the company's new stock management system for the new laser-curved fruit.

(Denise on phone)

Denise: Yes Anna...the new girl...she's done really well although I don't know what experience she's got....anyway, about the hairdresser you mentioned, oh I loved his aftershave...

Tom: I can't understand it. I've got all the experience and all the ideas...she's just such a...

Anna: Tom. Sorry to interrupt, I just wanted to check you're ok with me leading this strategy for stock management.

Tom: Oh of course not. You deserve it.

Narrator: That was a nice touch Anna.

Anna: But Tom, now you must help me.

Tom: Eh?!

Narrator: Anna! That's not the best way to ask for help. Remember what I've always told you about politeness?

Anna: Be polite – yes you keep telling me that.

Narrator: And if you want someone to help you, ask them, don't tell them – even if it is Tom!

Anna: Oh right. I'm in a bit of a panic. I've never done this before. I don't know where to begin.

Narrator: Well start by asking your colleagues for help like this:
I would be most grateful if you could give me some help
Please could I ask you for some advice?
I know you're busy but could you spare me a few minutes of your time please?
Go on, give it a try!

Anna: Right, thanks. I'll try. Erm, excuse me Tom. Sorry about earlier. I'm a little nervous about leading this strategy thing and I would be most grateful if you could give me some help....please?

Tom: Of course Anna. Why didn't you say, I'd be delighted. I've lost count of the number of projects I've lead over the years.

Anna: Great, thanks. So...where do you think I should begin?

Tom: Give me a few minutes and I'll find some of the excellent work I did last year. You'll just need to copy it really. Hold on...

Paul: Ah Anna...just popping out for some biscuits....err, how's the stock management strategy coming along?

Anna: Oh very good Paul....actually, please could I ask you for some advice?

Paul: Yes of course....although I don't know if I'll be much use!

Tom: ...now where did I save those damn documents?...

Anna: I'm very grateful for this opportunity but I'm a little unsure of where to start. Tom is looking for some his old work but...

Paul: Really?! To be honest, this isn't Tom's speciality. At a time like this I would ask Denise.

Anna: Denise!?

Paul: Yes...she may only be the office assistant but she always has words of wisdom. Right...custard creams or chocolate digestives?

Anna: What?

Paul: Biscuits?

Anna: Oh...custard creams please. Err, Denise, I know you're busy but could you spare a few minutes of your time please?

Denise: Of course Anna, always happy to help you.

Anna: Well you know the stock management control system?

Denise: The one you've now got to work out...well done for getting that!

Anna: Thanks. I really don't know where to begin. It was OK writing it down for Paul but how do I put it in to practice? There's just too much to do!

Denise: Calm down Anna. You'll be fine. The first thing you need to do is to look at our current system.

Anna: Look at our current system. How do I do that?

Denise: Easy! Just take the lift down to the warehouse and speak to Mr Ingle and then write down what you find – and draw up an action plan of tasks you need to do – like a shopping list – I’m very good at those.

Anna: Go and see Mr Ingle? Oh do I have to.

Denise: He’s ok really Anna. If you approach him in the right way he won’t bite your head off!

Anna: What? Bite my head off! Oh...well, if he won’t bite me...then I suppose I should go and see him. Thanks for your advice Denise, I could kiss you. Right, I’m going to go and see him right now.

Narrator: Make an action plan! A good idea. Well done Denise, you’re smarter than you look! And well done Anna, you eventually got the help you needed by using these phrases:

I would be most grateful if you could give me some help

Please could I ask you for some advice?

I know you’re busy but could you spare me a few minutes of your time please?

Remember, if you’re stuck for ideas just ask for help...but maybe not Tom, I wonder how he’s getting on?

Tom: (*shouting across room*) Here Anna, I’ve got them. Look, all my ideas from my last stock control project...pages and pages of them. Just copy these, they’re brilliant. Anna? Anna!

Paul: ...too late, I’ve just seen her in the lift. Fancy a custard cream Tom?

Narrator: So Anna is off to speak to the prickly Mr Ingle. Let’s hope she uses those phrases to ask for help, otherwise she might get her head bitten off – and it could get very messy! See you next time.

Listening challenge:

What does Denise advise Anna to do first when planning the stock management strategy?

(Answer: To look at the current system)