



The Gift of Asking

A WOMAN'S GUIDE TO
CREATING PERSONAL POWER

Kemi Nekvapil

About the author

Kemi Nekvapil has a passion for women fulfilling their potential, not only for themselves but for each other, too.

As a credentialed life-coach, speaker and author Kemi has worked in the wellness space for over two decades.

Kemi was an actor, who had leading roles on UK TV and did seasons with both The Royal Shakespeare Company and the National Theatre. She left acting when she realised it was not her passion, and became a professional chef working in London's first certified organic restaurant.

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It is her personal and professional experiences that have led Kemi to become a professional life coach. She understands the importance of women claiming their lives as their own, without apology or guilt.

Kemi is a respected speaker and a regular media commentator on women's self-love, self-care and personal power.

She lives in Melbourne with her husband and two children.

She is a passionate endurance runner, yogi, organic gardener, traveller, reader and weightlifter.

For my children, Benjamin and Ella.

Thank you for always asking me.

I have grown because of you.

*I pray you will always feel worthy enough
to ask for anything.*

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*“If you don’t go after what you want,
you’ll never have it.
If you don’t ask,
the answer is always no.
If you don’t step forward,
you’re always in the same place.”*

— Nora Roberts

Preface

Wherever you are in this journey called life, there is a very big chance that within the first few chapters of this book you will become curious about what you are not asking for in your own life and why you are not asking for it.

You will become aware of the impact of not asking on yourself and on those around you, and awareness is the best place to start.

The opening chapters are meant to do this – shine a light on all you have experienced about asking, and all you have been led to believe about asking.

We are all at different stages in our lives; some women find it incredibly easy to ask for anything they want and need, and others, not so much. We can be bold enough to ask for more water at a café, yet be unable to ask for more support around the home.

You will read about the many reasons why we do not ask, and you will read the personal ‘asking stories’ of women I interviewed for this book. These women have boldly shared their journeys in the hope that it will elevate you in your journey.

Some of these women are clients I have coached and some are personal friends. In the spirit of sharing honestly and freely, some have chosen to use pseudonyms to protect their privacy.

You will also learn about my asking journey and how it has impacted my life.

By reading different women's stories you will see that wherever you are in life, asking can be a powerful tool for personal growth and for increasing self-worth.

Every ask and want is not always met with a yes, however, so you will also find chapters to support you in navigating 'no' responses and to powerfully choose your next step.

I also decided to write a chapter devoted to women saying no. It is impossible to create what we want for ourselves if we are a 'yes' to everyone else.

And of course this book is also about action, because it is action that changes things, not insights. There are five asking processes throughout the book that are designed to get you flexing your asking muscles and introduce you to a new way of living.

Finally, the insights you gain from reading *The Gift of Asking* may sometimes be confronting, and may even lead to a strong personal transformation. It is not until we can face what we have been tolerating, denying and resenting that we can begin to create something else. By the end of this book your relationship to asking will be completely transformed.

My ultimate wish is that this book will play a part in allowing you to own your self-worth and ultimately your life. May you become braver and bolder with every ask.

Introduction

Three in one hundred and fifty

I was recently presenting to 150 women at a wellbeing festival, speaking on the subject of women asking for what we need and want. As I spoke, a bold and very personal question that I had not planned to ask came into my head.

“How many of you here have only ever had sex when you have genuinely wanted to?”

Of the 150 women in the room, only three of us put up our hands. For whatever reason – and whether it was once, twice or regularly – the other 147 women did not feel they could ask for what they really wanted.

Even though it was their body, they were unable to say, “I need something else right now.” They didn’t feel they could ask, “Do you think we could just cuddle tonight?” Or “Would you mind going out to get me some chocolate instead?”

I’d previously been surprised by the revelation of a single woman on the dating scene who basically had sex with men so that she could be cuddled. “But of course I would never just come out and *ask* for a cuddle,” she said, horrified. “*That* would be weird!”

If I ask, I am...

Even though the specific questions I ask at various speaking events may differ, the response of the majority of my female audiences is always the same.

I'll say, "Who likes to help and support people? Who likes contributing to others?" And every woman puts up her hand.

I then ask, "Who likes being helped? Who likes being contributed to?" No one raises their hand. No one.

The first time this happened I was so shocked, I posed both questions again. And when I suggested everyone look around to see the obvious imbalance, they too were amazed.

So I asked the group why this imbalance was happening – why we as women struggle to ask for help. This is what they came up with:

If I ask, I am weak.

If I ask, I am a burden.

If I ask, I won't get it.

If I ask, I will look stupid.

If I ask, I might get it...

So I wrote this book

Asking for what we need is not about being selfish or greedy or base. Asking for what we need allows us to live as though we are worthy – because we are.

This is why I decided to write *The Gift of Asking*.

Whatever we want to achieve in our lives, there will be a certain point we get to where we have to ask for support – if we do not, we cannot move forward. And in asking for support from another person, we expand who they are – we are able to validate their gifts and their unique contribution.

This book is a sharing of my observations as a life coach, and includes personal anecdotes, other women's stories and my

suggestions – all intended to show how you can allow yourself to ask for what you need and want.

If you are a woman who rarely asks for what you need or desire, these pages will give you permission to do so.

However, *The Gift of Asking* is not just about elevating your own sense of self – it is also a gift to those who we ask. For, as I mention in my first book, *Raw Beauty*, “If we refuse contribution from others, we close down their worlds and ours.”

No (wo)man is an island. If we want to contribute to others, achieve our dreams and be fulfilled, we have to allow others to contribute to us.

Asking not only validates your worth, it also validates the worth of the other.

So the gift this book offers is to inspire these thoughts:

“I am worthy enough to ask for help.”

“I am worthy enough to be asked.”

Need or want?

While I was thinking about how to write this book, I struggled for a long time over the difference between ‘needing’ and ‘wanting’. I wrestled with my own long-held belief that to ‘need’ is right, proper and pure, whereas to ‘want’ is greedy, unnecessary and selfish. Both words, I realised, are pretty loaded.

How do the words ‘want’ and ‘need’ make you feel? If the first stirs up thoughts of bad people being greedy, and the latter of good people being virtuous, you are not alone. It is extremely common for women to make this association – and to deprive ourselves of things that are important to us because of it.

We all need things that allow us to be fully present in our lives, and these needs differ for each woman. But when these needs are met we are able to live the full expression of ourselves.

Working out what constitutes a need (versus a want) and how to rank its importance can be quite complex, too. Our need for love is more important than our need for a kitchen table, for example, but most people want and need both. And some people may believe that our need for good health is more important than our need for fun, but most people want and need both.

To complicate things further, in acknowledging and satisfying our needs we do not want to be seen as weak and burdensome – we do not want to be known as ‘needy’.

It felt like walking through a mine field so, for the purposes of this book, I have chosen to use the word ‘need’ most of the time. To need in the moment, to need in the long term, and to need without guilt or apology.

We all have needs. The basic universal ones – food, shelter and safety – go hand in hand with our emotional and spiritual need to feel loved, to feel heard, to be validated, to feel seen, and to feel valued and supported.

None of these needs makes us weak; in fact, they all make us kinder people – kinder to others and to ourselves.

I will also use the word ‘want’ as necessary since we all have perfectly reasonable wants and need not be ashamed of them.

Whether it is a need or a want, or something in between, having it fulfilled is not a birthright. And this book is about making it happen – through acting on it and asking.

Creating with courage

None of us deserves a life that is automatically fulfilling – we need to create our own fulfilled existence as individuals. It takes work, practice and commitment, as well as vulnerability, courage and bravery. It includes failure and upset, and trying again. It is not always comfortable or easy, but it is always worth it.

Every time we complain about what someone else is or is not doing, it is a great opportunity to look at what we are or are not doing. It is a good time to ask ourselves these questions:

“Am I asking or am I settling for what is easy?”

“Am I fulfilled or am I frustrated?”

“Am I doing or am I hoping?”

You see, we can spend so much energy and time complaining, when we could be creating a much better outcome through asking and doing.

Of course, it takes courage to take action; it always has and always will. It also takes bravery to state what you need. And it requires immense vulnerability to ask for more than what has been dealt out to you.

Most importantly, it takes feeling worthy to take action.

Feeling your worth

Worthiness is at the core of so many decisions we make about ourselves and others. It is the foundation of how we treat ourselves and how we treat others. It dictates and defines what we feel we deserve in all areas of life – who we have as friends, who we choose as a life partner, who we do business with, where we go, what careers we have and how we experience the world.

But worthiness is a tricky concept. Who can say whether I am worthy? Who decides if you are worthy?

The fact is, other people cannot pronounce you or me worthy. Only we as individuals can make that call. Not our friends, partners, parents, bosses or children.

So next time you catch yourself putting your worthiness into the hands of others, stop. Your self-worth is too big a burden for another person to carry – it is your responsibility to nurture and manage.

Active asking

Action changes everything. For example, the action of asking for what we need catapults us into a place of worthiness and value. So instead of waiting to be worthy enough to ask for what you need, ask away and in the process you will become worthy. When you find yourself in certain situations, ask yourself:

“Do I value myself enough to ask?”

“Am I worthy enough to state my preference in this situation?”

We will not always get what we ask for – and sometimes that is for the best – but we will always build our worthiness just by taking the action of asking in the first place.

The cost of not asking

There is no end to the list of reasons we give for not asking for what we need and want. Here are some more reasons that women have shared with me. How many ring true for you?

I do not want to look greedy.

I am too scared.

I am afraid of getting a no.

I am afraid of getting a yes.

I am afraid of looking stupid.

I am scared of being rejected.

I do not want to appear arrogant.

I do not want to be a burden.

Okay, so we may think it is simply easier not to ask, since we do not want to be rejected, embarrassed or to feel uncomfortable. However, the impact on women of *not* asking for what we need and want seems much more profound. These are just some of the consequences of not asking:

- Building resentment
- Constant disappointment
- Anger
- The need to blame
- Withdrawing from others
- Shutting down
- Nagging
- Testing
- Punishing
- Suffering and causing others to suffer
- Hoping instead of doing
- Tolerating
- Feelings of failure
- Feelings of jealousy
- Judging of others
- Gossiping
- Feeling like a victim

What are you not asking for, and what is the impact of this inability to ask on your day-to-day wellbeing and experience of life?

How I improved my ask-ability

We have all had certain life experiences where we asked for something and we got a no, a rejection. It could have sounded like this: “Who do you think you are to ask that?” “Be grateful for what you have.” “If you ask for help, people will think you are weak.” “Never ask for anything.” “If you ask for anything, you are being selfish.”

I had many versions of this throughout my childhood, some of which I will share with you later. Let me just say, my biggest barrier to asking for what I wanted was my own internal voice. I used to believe that if you wanted a job done properly, it was best to do it yourself. This left me feeling exhausted and resentful, which is not a fulfilling place to be.

Luckily for me, I married an ‘asker’ – although sometimes what he asks for embarrasses me, and what I ask for embarrasses him, because we both need and desire different things.

During 12 months of travelling around Australia in a caravan with our two children, the two of us explored asking for what we wanted and many doors opened to us that might otherwise have remained closed – not just externally but within our marriage as well. We are very clear on what each other needs at various times because we ask each other often. We do not spend time guessing; we ask.

I have taught my children to ask for what they want, too; that if they do not ask it is always a no, but if they do ask they may get a yes or another opportunity may be presented to them.

My daughter puts me to shame the way she is becoming the ultimate asking master; my son has learned to ask more, after he realised that if he does not ask he misses out.

Are you an asker?

Like so much in life, our ability – or inability – to ask for what we need and want depends on our external and internal programming. Like so many women, your life experience and internal responses may have rendered you mute as far as expressing your needs goes. Maybe you do ask, but only to a certain point.

I once had a client who gave herself permission to have a massage (a big step for her), but when she got to her appointment the room was too cold, she did not like the music being played, the massage was not deep enough and she could not relax. Even though the therapist had told her to ask if she wanted anything changed, she did not ask.

This woman had been looking forward to some self-care – which she had paid for – but she was afraid to ask for what she needed. So in the end she did not get what she wanted, and was left feeling frustrated and disappointed.

It was only once we were discussing this during a session that she realised she rarely asked for what she wanted and constantly found herself disappointed.

The reason the therapist asked the client to ask for what she needed was so that she – the therapist – could do her best work. But because the client did not state her needs, neither she nor the therapist got what they wanted.

The art of asking

When we ask, we can be shifted into another dimension – one where the world is full of people who say yes, and where the ones who say no have only said no. They have not said no to us as a person; they have said no to the ask.

Once you start feeling the power of asking openly, it will trigger all sorts of exciting possibilities. You will start thinking, maybe I need to ask someone else. Maybe I need to ask for less, ask differently, or maybe I need to put some more work in and ask again at another time.

By not asking to start with, many women reject their needs and wants long before anyone else has the chance to do so. These women might think:

“There is no point in me asking, I know what they are going to say.”

“I am not good enough to ask for that.”

“They will say no, so why bother?”

“I already asked and they said no.”

Something I learnt a long time ago is that I have no idea what someone else’s answer is going to be unless I ask them. Everything else we decide is an assumption, either based on our take on the current situation, or based on something that happened in the past.

For many of us it feels safer to assume that we know what the answer will be than to actually ask the question in the first place. But we need to keep in mind that we have all had no for an answer before and that we have all survived worse, and unless we ask the question, we will never know the answer.

When we ask for what we need, we cultivate a lighter energy for ourselves and those around us. We experience a greater sense of flow

INTRODUCTION

and ease by asking for support from others, and we experience an increased level of worthiness and personal power.

So my message to you in this book is simple and powerful.

“Ask.”