

Behaviors that Fuel Innovation #2: Make Requests - The Direct Path to Commitments

by Michael Glessner

The [last post of this series reviewed making commitments](#) as a behavior fundamental to successful innovation execution. Knowing the importance of commitments in driving results, it's only prudent to go back in time a bit further and consider this: how does an effective manager get project participants to make commitments? The answer is by building joint accountability for project success through formal requests.

At the beginning of a project, roles and responsibilities are often defined, but this provides only the framework within which a project needs to be developed and initiated. Project managers enable the planning through a series of specific requests to drive the desired project outcome.

When I am interested in getting a certain task completed by someone else within a project plan, I approach the person I think best suited to do that work and I make a formal request of them. I ask them to complete task X, by the timeframe Y. As it stands at this point, it is only a request. No commitment exists. In fact, the monkey is still on my back as the person I am addressing has not accepted this request yet. I still own getting the work done. It should also be noted that just putting tasks in a plan and writing a name next to each task does not replace the conversation about turning such a request into a commitment.

In response, the person hearing the request has three options.

1. **Accept the request** – As the person accepts the request, the request immediately becomes their commitment. The person now owns the result, and I can move on to build further plans upon this information.
2. **Decline the request** – For a variety of reasons the person may decline the request outright. In many organizations if a request is not made, project leadership may never really know what the person intends to do. In that instance, any plan that relies on that outcome is without basis (without their commitment to complete the work).
3. **Counter the request** – This is the in-between answer. I can't do X by that timeframe, but I can do Z. Would that work for you? This often begins a very productive dialogue of what I really need and what the person can really do. Such dialogue eventually results in a workable commitment from the person that I can confidently include in the plan. It often reveals the constraints that I have on my request and that the person has on his or her time during the timeframe considered. Many times together through dialogue we can come up with an answer better than either of us could have offered separately.

These responses can take the form of a quick conversation or a short email. The key is that they formally accept the request, or alter the conversation to specifically what the person is able to do. Know that making the request without an affirmative response is not a commitment. The responsibility still rests with the requester to drive this situation to a workable commitment.

Requests are the most direct technique to win commitments from individuals in complex situations. It's important to note that your direct supervisor or project team leader has the privilege and the right to demand work from you. This is not negotiable, and requires your immediate attention. As a leader of various people over decades, I can count on one hand the instances that I needed to demand work from someone. I found the technique of making requests of my direct reports far more useful and productive.

More Reading

[Four Behaviors that Fuel Innovation](#)

[Behaviors that Fuel Innovation #1: Make Commitments - The Corner Stone of Results](#)

[Behaviors that Fuel Innovation #2: Make Requests - The Direct Path to Commitments](#)

[Behaviors that Fuel Innovation #3: Escalate for Rapid Conflict Resolution](#)

[Behaviors that Fuel Innovation #4: Make Offers to Take the Game to a Whole New Level](#)

Kalypso's [Innovation Results Transformation methodology](#) relies on such behaviors along with the structured approach to bring about innovation results over extended periods of practice. [Click here to learn more.](#)

Originally published on March 17th, 2015

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