

Chapter 7

SECTION 3.

REQUESTS AND OFFERS

“You miss 100% of the shots you don’t take.”

Wayne Gretzky

We’ve covered assertions, assessments, and declarations. Let’s now explore the language acts we call *requests and offers*. These will serve as a lead-in to *promises* and the remainder of the book.

Much of what’s involved in this chapter involves both requests and offers, although to keep things simple we’ll be speaking primarily about requests. But in virtually every situation, what we say about requests can be said about offers. The only difference, of course, has to do with who is committing him/herself to take some specified action and who is doing the accepting or declining. Let’s explore.

We say that requests, offers and promises are the speech acts that *directly* involve other non-hermits and actually bring forth non-hermit-hood. I can be alone, making assertions and assessments and declara-

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tions. But with requests, offers, and promises I'm *by definition* having conversations with others, coordinating future action with others.

This point is critical to understand and may be so close we overlook it. *Human life, for the vast majority of us, is all about coordinating action with others, in an incredible variety of ways.* We do what we do with and through others. The results we get in all areas, including our well-being, have a great deal to do with the way in which we *coordinate action* (do things) with others. Requests, offers, and promises have everything to do with this basic and pervasive connection. So let's start with a question: *Do you make requests in your life?*

Many people respond with Yes, of course. Many people say they make many requests, every single day. Lots of people say they make frequent requests. The great majority of us make at least some requests. Think about this. Think about the requests you make at work or home, in business or personal situations, even though you may not formally call them requests. Human beings make requests all the time, in a huge variety of situations. So to set this up, we can say that requests are absolutely part of our lives.

Second question: *Why do you make requests? Or why does anyone ever make any request?* Clearly, people make specific requests for specific reasons. I'm looking for a broader answer here. I'm inviting you to look at the whole phenomenon of making requests in the first place—what is going on such that anyone would ever make any request? Is it possible to look at the whole category of requests this way?

We say this: ***We make requests when we have an assessment that the future is going to unfold in a certain way, and we don't like that. We want the future to unfold in a different way than it seems to be heading by itself, and in order to put things in action to bring this about, we make a request. Requests are profoundly creative!*** For example, let's say I'm a teacher, and I have the assessment that if nothing happens, the future is going to unfold in such a way that I'm going to end up grading 150 essays by myself. I don't like this, so I make a request of my colleague to assist me. She accepts my request, and now the future unfolds in a better way, from my perspective. A future that includes my grading 75 papers due tomorrow works better for me than a future that includes my grading 150 papers!

Or I may have the assessment that the future, if left to its own devices, will unfold in such a way that my grass will not be cut. It will just grow

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and grow. I don't like this, so I request that Bubba cut the grass. If he accepts, the future now is different, and I like it better the new way. Or I may believe that if nothing happens, my company will continue doing Process A or Procedure B the same way in the future. I don't like this, as I see opportunities to do things better. I request that the appropriate people get together to discuss possibilities. I may offer to lead or coordinate the conversation. A new possible future has just been initiated.

Make sense? This is not the only way to view requests, of course. But to me, seeing requests in this manner has a way of focusing on how we can exercise some power to influence the future. We can invent the future in this way. We can intervene on what we think the future will look like, and put in motion events which may lead to results we say we're looking for.

We also see another way in which language—in this case, requests—generate and create. This is related to *public identity*, with the collective assessments others have about us. Public identity has to do with who we “are” in the world, with how we show up for other people. This is important, because that's who the world interacts with. That's who the world talks to, hires, fires, deals with, and enters into relationships with.

Consider this. Have you ever been in a situation in which you wanted to make a request, but didn't? Something stopped you, either fear or worry or whatever, but you didn't do it. Now bring to mind a similar situation in which you *did* make the request. It may have been hard, but you somehow did it. Notice how different those situations were, for you and for others. Our claim is that when you make a request, you're not just making a request. You are shifting who you “are” in the world. Whereas before you may have been a person who lets something like that pass without saying anything, now you're a person who stands up and makes a request. You are seen differently by others. You *are* different to them. You *are* different.

Consider the differences in these 2 relationships:

- In relationship A, one person does what he or she does, and this is not what the partner was looking for. It bothers the partner. But the partner *never makes a request* to discuss it in any way. The behavior simply goes on and on.
- In relationship B, one person does what he or she does, and again this is not what the partner was looking for. It bothers the partner. In