



Asking Permission

For many of us it is easier to beg forgiveness than to ask permission.

If you really want to do something, why risk being told “no”? Why endure the hassle of trying to sell your point? Why listen to pessimists who say that what you want to do can’t be done? Why take the time to see how your actions might impact others?

On one side of the permission spectrum are people who feel their personal freedoms and potential are restricted by seeking permission. On the other side are the people who take ownership or responsibility for a person, object or situation. A power struggle may ensue. Employee versus employer. Student versus teacher. Child versus parent.

The word permission comes from the Latin meaning “to let go through”. The term derives from a time when one needed written or verbal authorization from landowners or Caesar to act without being punished; for example permission to travel across someone’s land or to transact business. Today civic permission continues with parking and building permits, as well as with legal contracts.

Rebellion, with an employee, student or child, begins when someone thinks permission should not be asked for something considered a fundamental

right. When I was in elementary school and junior high, I thought it was ridiculous that students had to ask permission to go to the bathroom or get a drink of water. What was next, ask permission to breathe?

As the adults in charge of a child’s environment we need to be careful of when we require permission. With excessive regulation we create distrust and defiance in relationships with children. Some people refer to this as being micro-managed. On the other hand, by not giving adequate guidelines for action we provide weak leadership, creating feelings of insecurity and disrespect that destroy trust in a relationship.

Take time to consider activities children should be able to do without asking permission. Even a toddler needs a method to safely and independently get a drink of water, prepare a snack, or play with certain toys.

Asking permission should be required of the younger child in terms of safety issues and learning to be considerate of others. Asking to go out to play is a safety issue. Requesting to be excused from the table is about teaching manners. “May I please” goes a long way in learning to get your way within the family and the larger world.

With the older child, permission requests should

be based on safety and cultural requirements. For the child over the age of six-years-old, we would want to have spent the first six years of life developing a relationship of mutual respect and trust. Instead of asking permission, the older child’s requests should be for adult assistance with an activity, learning something new, or working through a problem.

Have a clear picture of what actions you would like or need your children to request permission. Ask if your requirements are based on safety and cultural needs. Be careful not to micromanage your children, while providing clear leadership.

Oh, and give plenty of breathing room.