

Getting What We Want From Others

by Stephen Reynolds

Life is full of numerous instances of each of us wanting things from others. Sometimes these “things” are as simple as getting our own “decaf non-fat double latte with no foam” the way we want it, or as complicated as getting someone to listen to a detailed description of our tiring day and receiving empathy for the many challenges we overcame in the process.

When we do NOT get what we want in a particular instance, it is common in our society to say, “**You did not...**” in some form. For example:

- You gave me whipped cream and I said I didn’t want any.
- You’re late, again!
- You are not listening to me.
- You don’t understand what it is like for me to have to.....
- You make me so angry!
- You are not dependable.
- You gave me the wrong thing.
- You don’t care about what I want.

While any or all of these may be “true” from a particular perspective, and may to varying degrees help explain why it is that we did not get what we wanted from another, they confuse **what we did not get** with **why we think we did not get it**.

By starting off with a “You”-statement like one of those listed above, we maximize the chance that our listener will respond defensively, thus diverting attention from our more important basic message, which is **I did not get what I wanted**.

We have a choice. We can either focus on (a) what **they did**, or on (b) what **we wanted**. Focusing on **what they did** tends to generate arguments about:

- What they did or did not **do**.
- Who **said** what.
- Whether or not they **listened** to us.
- Whether or not they are **being fair**.
- The degree to which they **care for us**.
- How honest they are and/or if we can **trust them**.

These types of arguments *rarely end up getting us what we want*. Even if they do, usually one or both parties pay a price in the process.

On the other hand, focusing on **what we want** produces a much different result. It is almost impossible to respond to “I did not get what I wanted” with “Yes, you did”. By keeping the conversation focused on **what we want**, we maintain control of the conversation. Conversely, if we shift the focus to **what they did**, **we give away our power to others**. After all, isn’t the entire reason for the exchange that **we did not get what we wanted**? So why waste our time on what the other person(s) did or did not do? Unfortunately, all too often this comes from a *desire to blame others for not getting what we wanted*.

The best way of getting what we want, now and in the future, is to keep the focus on what is wanted, **without ever using the word “you.”**



If we say:**The most likely outcome is:**

“I did not get my coffee the way I wanted it.”	Focus on what is wanted
“I did not get my coffee the way I asked for it.”	Argument about what was asked for
“You did not make my coffee the way I asked you to.”	Argument about what was said and/or what was done
“This coffee isn’t right.”	One of the above arguments
“This isn’t what I asked for.”	Argument about what was said

Attachment I is an example of how we can get what we want even when confronted with an individual who is more inclined to be defensive and/or argumentative than to focus on complying with our request., we may have to refocus the conversation on **what we want** several times.

As the example in attachment I shows, as soon as we shift our focus from **what we want** to contradicting the other person, we lead ourselves into a debate or argument. Our chance of getting what we want drops dramatically.

Our cultural norm is to **shift the focus of the conversation to what the other person is saying**, rather than repeating, **“I did not get what I wanted.”** We may have been taught that to do so is selfish or self-centered. This is unfortunate, as we are simply restating something that is true for us, **“I did not get what I wanted.”** Beware --- many people will infer “you”-statements. This is **their doing**; do not fall into the trap of accepting responsibility for what is created in the mind of another.

If we maintain our boundaries and stand firm in our position, **without ever accusing others of being wrong**, we not only center ourselves (improving our self-esteem), we also further the development of boundaries that better serve us and enhance our self-empowerment. This in turn will help us maintain more productive, satisfying, candid and intimate relationships with others.

We welcome your feedback on this article. Send comments to: Feedback@CGMediation.com

Copyright © 2005 Common Ground Mediation Services

Attachment I

Getting What We Want From Others

