

Exploring the Impact of Gratitude and Self Compassion on Asking Behaviours, Networking Skills
and Career Outcomes

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Section I: Introduction

Think back to the last time someone asked you for help. What logic led to your decision to help or not help? Now think back to the last time you made a poor decision because you did not ask for help, but should have. What assumption(s) prevented you from asking for support? As you've learned through the course of Just Ask, asking for help can be difficult because it requires us to take a step toward vulnerability.

Past research has identified many benefits of embracing vulnerability, including greater authenticity, better relationships, and 'wholehearted living'. Practicing gratitude and exercising self-compassion have been presented as methods we can use to embrace vulnerability (Brown, 2012). Rather than using a measure of vulnerability in this study, our aim is to examine potential relationships between gratitude, self-compassion, asking for support and an individual's networking skills. Each of these variables will be described in Section Two. A better understanding of these relationships may help us to be more grateful, self-compassionate and improve our ability to ask for help.

This study is built upon the following three assumptions

- 1.) Practicing gratitude and self-compassion leads to wholehearted living by embracing vulnerability.
- 2.) Asking for help requires an individual to display vulnerability.
- 3.) Receiving the support of your network is essential to career success.

This paper is divided into five sections. Section One is the Introduction. Research design, participant recruitment, and methods are covered in Section Two. Post Study Interview themes are presented in Section Three. Future areas of research are discussed in the final section.

Our Findings in Brief

Our findings suggest that practicing gratitude and demonstrating self-compassion by enlisting the support of your network leads to desirable career outcomes. Over the next few pages, we will share with you how our research led us to this conclusion.

All of the findings below are supported by results of participant interviews and statistical analysis. That said, this was a pilot study with limited sample size, analysis decisions were made to give the greatest chance of discovering significant relationships.

1. A relationship between self-compassion and networking skills exists

Participants scoring high on the self-compassion assessment also scored high on the networking skills assessment.

2. A relationship between gratitude and networking skills exists

Participants scoring high on the gratitude assessment also scored high on the networking skills assessment.

3. A relationship between self-compassion, a willingness to ask for help, and perceived positive career outcomes exists

Participants who scored high on the self-compassion assessment responded that asking for help has positively impacted their career.

4. A relationship between gratitude, a willingness to ask for help and perceived positive career outcomes exists

Participants that scored high on the gratitude assessment responded that asking for help has positively impacted their career.

5. Self-compassion and gratitude both increase an individual's willingness to ask for help.

Section II: Research Design & Methods

A mixed methods research design that included both survey and interviews was selected for the study. Measuring participant networking and relationship progress research over a twelve-week period gave participants time to build gratitude, compassion and networking skills.

Participant recruitment: We used several methods to recruit participants for the study. Our research team began by recruiting participants from our personal networks. Second, we partnered with BNI (Business Network International), the world's largest professional networking organization. BNI was also an ideal partner as they enabled us to recruit participants globally. Recruiting diverse participants was a primary goal since it is a relatively new area of research, broad insights are valuable. Research participants represented the following countries: Australia, Canada, China, Malaysia, Singapore, South Africa, United Kingdom and United States.

In sum, 352 participants submitted interest forms, 121 signed consent forms and 36 participants completed the study. We conducted interviews with eleven participants. A thematic analysis was conducted to identify key themes from the interviews. A thematic analysis is a technique used to identify themes from the information gathered during participant interviews. Thematic analysis results are shared in Section Four.

Research Administration: The twelve-week pilot included weekly virtual networking training sessions with videos and assigned workbook content. Our research was administered in the context of a networking training program to retain participants that would encourage 'asking' behaviors.

Participants were assigned five gratitude exercises and three self-compassion exercises. The exercises were intended to help participants learn to practice gratitude and self-compassion in real time. The self-compassion exercises were intended to help participants limit self-judgement and comparison to others. To build gratitude awareness, participants were directed to count their blessings, write gratitude letters, and complete a mental subtraction exercise. The mental subtraction exercise tasked participants to: 1. Select an important accomplishment or relationship, and 2. Visualize in detail how life would be different without the relationship/accomplishment.

Framework for journaling was provided to participants. Participants were also provided access to a Google Sheet to journal, complete exercises, and track networking activities.

During the weekly virtual networking training sessions, researchers highlighted specific areas of the weekly modules and provided an overview of training content.

Researchers used several participant retention strategies. First, the weekly meetings offered regular touchpoints with participants. Researchers also applied gaming techniques to retain participants. A Networking Olympics inspired friendly competition in which the total number of referrals from each country were cumulatively added together and presented on a virtual session midway through the study. This strategy was used to drive engagement and encouraged participants to track their activity.

Participants also completed a post-study survey that included gratitude and compassion assessments and a networking skills assessment. The survey also included questions about the impact of gratitude and compassion on an individual's willingness to ask for help.

Section III: Study Results

We completed eleven semi-structured interviews after the study to better understand individual participant responses and potential relationships we sought out to explore. Participants were asked ten open-ended questions, each related to the variables in the study. The interviews were voice recorded and averaged thirty minutes in length. The six themes (figure 1) listed below emerged as the most common responses as a result of interviews and subsequent thematic analysis. The descriptions that accompany each theme includes quotes and statements. The statements and quotes are included for one or more of the following three reasons: 1. Participants said it was important, 2. The statement was repeated by multiple participants, or 3. The statement is new, interesting, or unique.

*The categories are listed in alphabetical order

1.Assumptions: It became clear during the interviews that making assumptions prevented participants from asking for support. Common reasons for not asking for support included:

- I. Not wanting to bother or inconvenience others
- II. Assumed judgement that the requestor would be viewed as weak, unqualified, or unable to do their job.
- III. The person who received the request would think a hierarchy would be established.

Through assumptions people found reasons not to ask for help. If I don't ask for help, I won't get rejected. Conversely, multiple participants reported a primary reason they will ask for help because it feels good to help and assume that others would like to help for that very reason.

2. Collective support: Collective support can be described as a belief in the value of having a trusted group of contacts who are able and willing to provide and receive support. This theme is consistent with past networking literature. Participants expressed beliefs that:

- I. Better decisions can be made with multiple opinions
- II. Others have been down this path
- III. No one does it alone
- IV. We are all in this together

3. Gratitude: Participants were instructed to complete a minimum of five gratitude exercises in the first two weeks of the study. This step was taken to help participants create awareness and experience gratitude through the course of the study.

Participants completed a gratitude survey after the study. During the interviews, participants were asked how gratitude influences their career and willingness to ask for support. The most frequent response was that expressing gratitude to people who have helped increases future support. Additionally, a similar response had variations of the following; ‘Gratitude leads to increased confidence, a sense of identity, and value to others.’ Multiple participants cited ‘expressing gratitude toward others builds their confidence and sense of self-worth. ‘By asking for help, you are actually helping others.’

4. *Learning:* The theme that emerged between learning and asking for support was simple; we learn by asking questions. It was expressed by participants that learning from others is a continuous process throughout one’s career. Also, participants beliefs about asking for help and support evolve over time. Multiple participants expressed a variation of the following; ‘When I was young I thought asking for help was a weakness, but as I matured I realized it was not only necessary but also a strength.’ Also, ‘By asking others for an introduction or support, you may help them to learn the process of providing introductions.’

5. *Self-compassion:* Participants were instructed to complete a minimum of three self-compassion exercises in the first two weeks of the study. This step was taken to help participants create awareness and cultivate self-compassion over the course of the study. Participants completed a self-compassionate survey after the study. During the interviews, several aspects of self-compassion emerged as themes. First, participants demonstrate self-compassion by accepting oneself. Further, self-compassion is demonstrated by being less judgmental and

critical toward self and others. Finally, multiple participants indicated that a belief that mistakes are human is a demonstration of self-compassion.

6. *Trust* – We asked participants, ‘Can asking for help/support be a demonstration of trust?’ The question elicited a variety of responses. Multiple participants indicated that they would not ask someone for help if they did not trust them. Conversely, other participants indicated the need to qualify the information received from an individual as trustworthy, not necessarily the person. One participant indicated that she proactively builds trust with employees by giving them challenging assignments.

A post-survey was also sent to 101 participants. Of 101 surveys sent out, 36 were completed, resulting in a 36.4% response rate. Demographic questions on the survey included gender, age, education level, race, and job level. Please visit <https://www.lopata.co.uk/> to view tables, variables, assessments, and results. In brief, researchers utilized descriptive statistics, correlations and regressions to explore relationships between gratitude assessment results, compassion assessment results, and network skills assessment results.

Section IV: Discussion

We learned from interviews that asking for help can be an intensely personal and the challenges associated with asking unique to each of us. What emerged from the study were several obvious points we can benefit by being mindful of:

1. Express gratitude toward others, it matters to them
2. Ask for support; your ask may make them feel good about themselves

- 3. Exercise self-compassion, no one is perfect.

This study had several limitations. First, there was a small sample of participants. An increased number of participants will enable more in-depth analysis of relationships between variables. Second, in the future, participants should complete gratitude and self-compassion assessments before and after the program because it will offer a baseline of where participants begin. Finally, by adding an experimental group and extending the pilot length, researchers can explore how gratitude and compassion may influence ‘asking behavior’ over time. In sum, Just Ask.

If you have questions about our methodology or would like to learn more, contact John Jameson at johnrjameson5@gmail.com.

Figure 1. Emerging themes from Interviews & Thematic Analysis

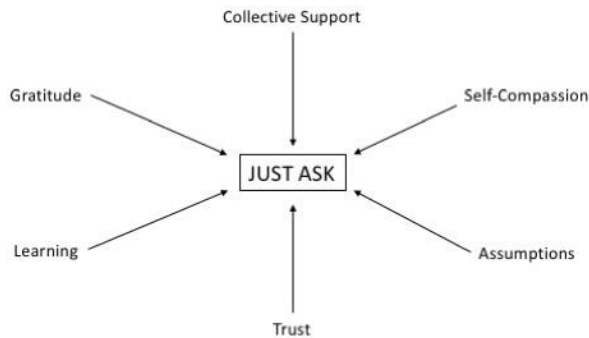
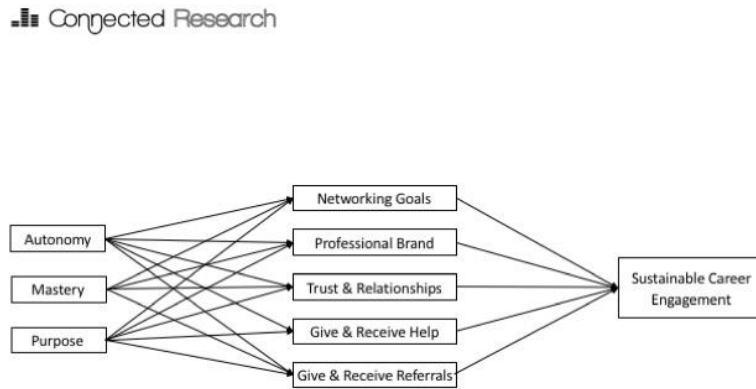


Figure 2. Networking Model used in NetSkill Self-Assessment



Acknowledgements

John would like to acknowledge the contributions of the following individuals for their contributions to the study: Paul Hettich, Jill McGinty, Nakware Howard, Ivan Misner, Amal Hussain, Jonathan Huynh, Katy Tegethoff, Kevin King, Andrew Torres, Nosa Ebomoyi, Carl Kutzmode, Cesar Lostaunau, and George Hay.

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