

Play to Win

## Get Specific With Your Ask

If you want results, this is how you do it.

By [Sally J. Schmidt](#)

I was walking down a sidewalk recently and saw a fellow asking for change on the corner. It struck me how many people were putting money into his cup. As I approached, he said, “Can you give me one quarter?”

From a distance, I had thought everyone must be in a generous mood. But, while this may seem like an odd segue into law firm marketing, it occurred to me later that his “ask” was really smart. He requested something specific.

I have observed that lawyers are often vague with requests. Maybe it’s because they don’t like to sell, or know how to sell, so they take a much softer approach. But if you want people to help you, they need to know exactly what you want.

### Making an Ask

There are myriad occasions when a lawyer should be more specific in order to get results. Here are some examples.

#### Getting involved in an organization:

- **Vague request:** “I’d love to get more involved in the association.”
- **Specific request:** “I’d love to be on the association’s board someday. I know it will take a lot of time and hard work but where would you suggest I start? [Is there a committee I could contribute to](#) or another role I could play to help the organization out?”

#### When you ask for referrals:

- **Vague request:** “Please think of me if any of your clients are looking for a real estate lawyer.”
- **Specific request:** “Would you be willing to introduce me to one of your clients? I remember you said you work with XYZ Company. Maybe we could set up a lunch with the three of us.”

#### Cross-selling to a client:

- **Vague request:** “If you ever need a lawyer in Los Angeles, we have an office there with some talented people.”
- **Specific request:** “I’d like to introduce you to my colleague, [Name], from our L.A. office. Can we set up a time for you to meet her when she’s in town for our partner meeting next month?”

#### When you ask to visit:

- **Vague request:** “I’d love to learn more about your business.”

- **Specific request:** “I really want to know more about your business. I am going to be in Nashville for a conference early next year. May I come by for a tour?”

### **Expressing interest in an internal role (e.g., management, practice group head, committee membership):**

- **Vague request:** “I hope you will consider me for the committee.”
- **Specific request:** “I have an undergraduate degree in HR and experience with a number of client integrations. I think I could add a lot to the lateral hiring committee.”

### **Trying to get work in a different practice area:**

- **Vague request:** “I’d love to get some more experience in the environmental area.”
- **Specific request:** “I’d love to do more work in your practice area. The next time you find yourself needing some help, will you reach out to me?”

### **Attempting to obtain a speaking engagement:**

- **Vague request:** “I’d love to be a speaker at one of your future meetings.”
- **Specific request:** “I’ve been doing a lot of programs lately on how we are dealing with privacy issues. Would you be interested in having a presentation on that topic?”

## **Help Them Help You**

The next time you’re hoping for a particular outcome, think about a way to phrase your goal more definitively. That way, your contacts will be better equipped to help you achieve it.