Asking for Help

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Asking for Help with MS

Multiple sclerosis is a humbling disease. It strips away your abilities in many creative and unpredictable ways.

It is important to remain as independent as possible while thumbing your nose to its ravaging nature.

Most days we can pull it off. We can saunter around like we have this thing under control and that we are just fine, thank you very much!

Some people are more fortunate than others and can remain independent for the majority of their lifespans. However, everyone – and I do mean every single one of us – will find ourselves in need of help from other people from time to time.

Why Asking for Help is Hard

Asking for help can be a very daunting task. It seems easy to ask for help, but many people carry an emotional pride that can get in the way and hold us back from saying those three important words: “I need help.”

Here’s an example:

You are on a business trip. You had to take an early morning flight out. You weren’t able to get any sleep the night before because you didn’t want to oversleep and miss your flight. You got off the plane and went straight to the office, scheduled for back-to-back meetings all day.

You realize that your fatigue is settling in and by 2 pm you are pinching your leg under the conference table so that you don’t pass out right there. The sheer act of keeping your eyes open becomes an act of futility and you are two seconds from becoming the laughing stock of the company for falling unconscious and slamming your head on the table in the middle of a meeting with new clients.

What do you do?

This is a tricky situation to be in. This example is a real situation from my own personal experience. I have to say, in that moment I was terrified! And if I’d had more energy, I am sure that I would have had an all out panic attack in that room.

Fortunately for me, I was too tired to have a panic attack add to the stress of the situation. Instead, I felt alone. I was sitting in a room full of strangers. The only two people that I knew were my boss and his peer from another department in our company. I used all of the coping skills that I could muster.

Next page: how to ask for help.

Why Asking for Help is Hard

Finally, I broke down and wrote a note to my boss. It read: “My MS fatigue is catching up with me. I am struggling with getting through this meeting.”

I was not proud that I could not keep up with the day. I still struggle with how all of those events unfolded. But I am proud that I acknowledged to myself that I needed help. I needed a lifeline.

My boss didn’t do anything to change my schedule, but there was solace in him knowing that I was running on fumes. He was able to ensure that the meeting didn’t fall too hard on my shoulders and that was enough for me to push through until the end of the day. I wasn’t happy, but I had survived.

How to Ask for Help

Asking for help never comes easy for me. I have an even harder time asking for it from people who I barely know or I know only in a professional climate.

The thing is though, I will never know when I am going to need help. I tend think of my disease as shameful, as though I didn’t do enough and that is why I need help. I often feel like I don’t deserve to be helped.

Also, sometimes, I feel like people will look down on me, feel sorry for me or judge me as worthless if I need them to help me. It is the idea of being worthless that can settle in and dig at me the worst.

I admit I dug in and let those terrible self-effacing thoughts dwell for a while after I was diagnosed. Sometimes those thoughts still want to sink in, even now, after so many years.

Getting rid of your negative inner dialogue is incredibly important to your happiness and ability to thrive and function as a member of society. We all carry negative thoughts that bring us down or hold us back. We all have run into people who reinforced those thoughts that we have hidden in our hearts and minds.

Going back to my earlier example, my boss did not help when I asked for it – not enough at least. He was able to move the focus off of me for the meeting, which helped in the immediate timeframe. He did not, however, give me space to adjust the rest of the day in a way that ensured a safe work environment.

Next page: using MS as a learning opportunity.

How to Ask for Help

These are details that I hate bringing up and I won’t dive too deeply into. Let’s just say that he tried to force me to walk to our hotel, which was a good distance away, and we weren’t in a walkable area. We did eventually get a taxi.

The driver noticed my condition and said words to my boss that are inappropriate for me to write for you here. Let’s just say that justice was served up swiftly that evening. He goes down in history as the coolest cab driver ever! I would have bought him a beer if I wasn’t already about to pass out.

Still though… I hate being that person who is so tired. So tired that a stranger in a taxi could see it as he was driving up and became instantly appalled before we even made eye contact.

Learning

I don’t like that pushing my hardest was not enough. I used to be able to push without limits. Now, I am reminded

at every turn of my fuel level. Sometimes I find out to late that my tank was drained without my knowledge and I am forced to find another way to survive, to get through.

I hated having to go through that experience. I have hated having to go through so many other similar experiences. I have wished it all away so many times. Truth is though, I learned a few things about the people in my life that day.

Firstly, I learned that my boss was not going to be enough. He was not a leader. He was too self involved to give me the help, the space, that I needed to thrive in that position as his employee. This was a disappointment, but my asking for help gave me a knowledge and clarity of how he measured up.

Secondly, I realized that some strangers will see you from the start. Some people will step up and help you in ways that you could not do for yourself – and not get fired!

That same taxi driver came to drive us all to the airport the next day. My boss asked me if I would like to sit up front. I deferred to him, “No! You’re the boss! You get to sit in the front!”

I flew back to Ohio and instead of going back into my old boring routine, I helped myself by quitting my job and opening my own company. Why? Because I may need help from time to time. But, in the end, I am not worthless! I am incredibly strong and I have this thing covered!

Now go on, and be your own badass selves! But always remember to ask for help when you need it.