

“Can I pick your brain?”

Five words that make up the most thoughtless, irritating and generic way to ask for **advice** — and any person who is a rock star in their industry has heard it more than a dozen **times**.

The phrase, while well-intentioned, is overused, vague and way too open-ended. When **conversations** start this way, there's no telling where it'll go or how long it'll take.

Don't get me wrong: I'm all for giving — and receiving — **advice**. Offering advice is a sign of good **leadership**, and asking for advice is a sign of **intelligence**. If the exchange goes well, both parties benefit.

“The whole interaction is a subtle and intricate art. It requires emotional intelligence, self-awareness, restraint, diplomacy and patience,” Harvard Business School professors Joshua D. Margolis and David A. Garvin wrote in a 2015 Harvard Business Review article.

But the process can derail in many ways. It can quickly lead to “**frustration**, decision gridlock, subpar solutions, frayed relationships and thwarted personal development,” according to Margolis and Garvin.

To avoid those **consequences**, here's **some guidance** on how to ask for **advice** without annoying the other person: