

Respond to vague calls for advice

When people ask “May I pick your brain?” it’s a compliment because they want to tap your expertise. When you’re strapped for time, it feels more like a hassle. Here’s what to do:

Find out what they need. Ask a few questions to discover what kind of support or information they want. You may not be the best person to speak to them, but if you decide to do so, you will be prepared to offer advice.

Send them existing resources. If you have created written materials, attended training on the subject or know of other valuable resources, share them. Suggest they look them over and send remaining—specific—questions to you. Some people want an easy out and to be told exactly what to do. This way, you provide a service, but put the onus on them to do some of the heavy lifting.

Decline—but offer an alternative. Sometimes, you simply can’t make it work. Say so but offer a bit of amends if you want. For example, “My schedule is packed. I could meet for lunch next Thursday” or “I can’t meet this week, but send me a few questions over email, and I will get back to you as soon as possible.”

— Adapted from [“Here’s Exactly What to Say When Someone Asks to ‘Pick Your Brain,’”](https://melodywilding.com) Melody Wilding, <https://melodywilding.com>.