

We're living in the Information Age, but relationships are still the currency of business – perhaps even more so, thanks to e-networking. Just as currency values rise and fall, so can the quality of relationships. The most common cause of a squandered relationship is selfishness – focusing on your own self-gratification, prioritizing your needs over others', wanting to always be right, taking sole credit for the work of many, and other “Me First” behaviors.

Selfishness is a poor approach to effective personal branding; it has an incredibly negative impact on relationships, and relationships are the key to your career success and upward mobility. On a bigger scale, selfishness in a leader impacts the team's morale, engagement, retention and productivity. Selfishness also makes work less interesting.

Me Me Me

Unfortunately, “fend for yourself” is the norm in some corporate cultures. If you need help creating a more effective path, read my three-step approach for getting in the habit of giving, published in my post “Make Giving Your Personal Branding Strategy.” But be careful: not all generosity is created equal. The highest form of giving is what I call genuine generosity. It is the true antidote to selfishness and a powerful technique for bolstering relationships while increasing your personal success and fulfillment.

What is genuine generosity?

The purest and most powerful form of generosity can be defined with the following formula:

Selfless intention + Sacrifice + Need = Genuine Generosity

Let's look at each element separately.

Selfless intention.

Selfless intention has to do with your motivations. If giving comes with an expected payoff for you, the quality of that generosity diminishes. If you have a slew of A-list sales leads, and you give one to someone with the expectation that they will give you something in return, your intention is about getting your needs met, not about theirs.

People can see through self-motivated generosity. When your intentions become apparent (as they always do), your colleague isn't going to feel grateful; she's just going to feel used. When you help someone, do so with no expectation of a reward. Your assistance should be a pure gift, not a loan that has to be repaid with interest.

In successful teams, members care about each others' success as much as they care about their individual triumphs.

Sacrifice.

Let's say you have a slew of A-list sales leads because your website generated far more interest than you anticipated; you'll never be able to personally contact each lead before their enthusiasm grows cold. If you pass along some of these leads to a colleague, you're being generous, but you're not making a sacrifice. Sacrifice occurs when it costs you something to take care of the needs of someone else. Forgoing your own satisfaction – whether it's in the form of a sales commission or something intangible, like public recognition – is an essential element of genuine generosity, which genuinely helps others.

One of today's most valuable commodities is time. We have so little of it to spare; giving away our time can be a significant sacrifice. The busier you are, the more it means when you sacrifice the time to provide valuable feedback and mentorship or to write a personal message of gratitude or congratulations.

Need.

This element emphasizes the recipient. Your most successful sales rep does not need one of your A-list leads. Even if you're making a sacrifice to pass the contact information on to him, the need is not there. Although your intention is pure and your sacrifice real, the need is missing. Genuine generosity starts with observing those around you and identifying their needs. Shifting the focus from your own needs makes it easier to pay attention to what's going on with others – listening attentively to your clients, employees and peers. The ultimate form of genuine generosity? Fulfilling that need without being asked to, and without being associated with the resolution.

Sound risky? It's not: self-centered living is the risky path. Once you begin practicing genuine generosity, you'll feel a renewed sense of purpose and the fulfillment of building truly authentic relationships. You'll add a powerful and attractive attribute to your personal brand. You'll feel great about how you made someone else feel. You'll increase your personal satisfaction, knowing that you made a difference.

In a world where many of us feel marginalized in the workplace or think our contributions don't count, the satisfaction that comes from genuine generosity is palpable. It shines a spotlight on the fact that everyone has something valuable to offer; we're not small, replaceable cogs in a very giant wheel.

So what does genuine generosity look like in the workplace? Here are some examples:

Encouraging your star performer to join another part of the organization because you know the company needs her there, and it will be a good career move for her.

Pitching in to solve a problem in another department because you know you have the unique, required skills, despite the fact that you have more on your plate than you can handle.

Giving your first class seat to a member of your team who has chronic back problems, even if it means you'll be sitting in middle seat 34B for your JFK-LAX trip.

Forwarding an attractive opportunity that you're offered to a colleague because you believe she is the best person for it and will do a great job, even though you would like to pursue the opportunity yourself.

Publicly acknowledging someone's contribution despite having had a rocky working relationship with that person.

## How Being Selfish Will Limit Your Career Success

Sunday, 24 August 2014 15:42

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Letting a co-worker have the office with walls, while you take a cubicle instead, because you know he has a greater need for privacy.

The most genuinely generous people seek out opportunities to give. They listen for needs, they spend time really getting to know others, and they make genuine generosity a habit.

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Source: Forbes Magazine