

Nonprofit Career Givers

When I started working at nonprofits, my friends in the corporate world saw my endeavor as cute, if not somewhat pathetic. They were taught that in order to succeed, you need to be a corporate warrior who steamrolls the competition and only pays attention to the bottom line. To them, the idea of helping anyone—even mentoring a new employee—seemed like a waste of time.

So, imagine their surprise when I came across new research that shows that being a giver might actually help you (and your career) in the long run.

Adam Grant's book, *Give and Take: A Revolutionary Approach to Success*, suggests that there are three types of people in the professional world—givers, takers, and matchers—and shows that some of our greatest business success stories have been about givers: Take Richard Branson, founder of the Virgin Group, Jon Hunstman, Sr., founder of Huntsman Corporation, and Adam Rikfin, one of the most powerful networkers in Silicon Valley, for example.

To be clear, givers are not necessarily nice or altruistic—and they certainly don't lack in ambition—but they are focused on contributing to more than their own bank accounts, whether

that's making sure that the right project gets noticed by someone with deep pockets or that a good computer programmer gets introduced to someone who's looking to hire for that exact position.

Not surprisingly, there's a high concentration of givers in the nonprofit industry—after all, we get into this business because we see what's beyond the bottom line and, ultimately, want to change lives. But we don't always harness this power effectively. Read on for three of the great benefits of being a giver and how we can avoid the common challenges that come along with them.

1. Give and You Shall Receive

Grant writes, "When we give our time, energy, knowledge, or resources to help others, we strive to maintain a belief that they're worthy and deserving of our help." In other words, generous givers don't have too much trouble making friends.

And that mentality is likely to come back around: When you're interested in helping other people succeed, you'll often find yourself with a stronger network of contacts who want to help you in return. For instance, if you happily edit your contacts' resumes or give them tips on their annual solicitation letters, they won't think twice about giving you a recommendation for your dream job or introducing them to your uncle (who just happens to be a major donor prospect you've been chasing for years). And that kind of help can be invaluable in your career.

The Challenge: Look out for Takers

As a giver, it may take some time—or a one-sided professional relationship or two—to realize that some people just aren't as generous as you are. If you notice that someone who isn't interested in “paying it forward” has snuck into your network, make sure you don't overinvest in him or her. You don't have to cut ties completely—but remember that your good deeds probably won't get you much in return. When it comes down to helping givers and takers, know that you'll get more appreciation and long-term respect from the givers.

2. You'll See Both Sides

According to Grant, givers generally have the ability to put themselves in other peoples' shoes, whether they're negotiating, managing, partnering, or cultivating. And this can be a great tool—by focusing a conversation on the other person's needs, givers can more easily see a way to satisfy both parties, instead of focusing solely on themselves.

Think of a fundraising conversation: Say the donor wants to give you \$1,000, but you want \$5,000. If you're only thinking about your own needs, you'll probably either insist on \$5,000 (or feebly accept his low initial offer). But being able to look at both sides of the coin, you'll be able to focus on the donor's concerns—say, since you know he is worried about cash flow this year, maybe you can get a five-year pledge for that \$5,000 or a promise to sponsor your next event. With that kind of win, you end up making your donor and your boss happy.

The Challenge: Know the Difference Between “Giving” and “Pleasing”

Being a giver isn't about being liked; it's about doing a good job that truly benefits everyone. And any parent can tell you that doing the right thing isn't always appreciated right away. But don't let this get in your way. If you had to cut a program manager's budget, for example, she probably won't be happy. But if you explain how and why (e.g., you cut materials costs so she could keep her staff during a funding crisis), she will eventually value your action and see that you did it for her benefit.

3. You Can Actually Make an Impact

Believe it or not, givers really can change the world—or at least part of it. Because when givers give, they inspire others to give. In the long run, this can make a big difference: Rather than everyone simply getting a piece of the pie, giving expands the pie.

For instance, consider a department that's obviously overextended with too much work and not enough hands. A taker, in this situation, would likely monopolize the department and concentrate all fundraising efforts on his or her own projects—and as a result, the structure of the organization would crumble as soon as he or she left.

A giver, on the other hand, may try to take on more staff at varying levels of experience, creating a leadership pipeline—not only helping the immediate staffing need, but also preparing leaders to take the organization in the right direction if he or she were to move on. Takers may be able to make immediate decisions and bring in quick funding on the spot, but a giver's power will last longer—because it's based on real relationships and trust.

The Challenge: Be Careful of Burnout

Grant writes that givers burn out when “they're working with people in need but are unable to help effectively.” If you are having trouble seeing how your help actually helps—or feel like it's not making an impact at all—consider asking your organization to help illustrate your impact by introducing you to a program participant who benefited from your job or taking on a volunteer role that has a more direct and visible effect.

Although giver tendencies aren't only helpful in nonprofits, our industry thrives on a giver mentality and is at its best when it is fully utilizing our strengths. So, ditch the idea that “greed is good,” embrace your generosity, and make sure it's working for you. Everyone will benefit in the long run.

One Key Trait That Will Boost Your Nonprofit Career

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