

Give and Take Summary

By Adam Grant

Nice guys finish last. Or do they?

Give and Take offers a research-backed view of what makes some people successful, and others less so. Adam Grant shows how reciprocity and success are linked, and that helping others ultimately drives our success.

Success at work can be attributed to passion, talent, hard work, and luck. However, there's a missing piece to this puzzle. Organizational psychologist and Wharton's youngest tenured professor, Adam Grant, shows that our success depends on how we interact with others and bases this on his pioneering research.

Grant shows that at work, people tend to operate as what he calls "takers, matchers, or givers." Takers strive to get as much as possible from others, matchers aim to trade evenly, but givers are the rare people who contribute without expecting anything in return.

Which of the three 'reciprocity' styles of interaction have the most success in the workspace? Surprisingly, it's the givers. Although some givers can be exploited and burn out at work, they can also achieve extraordinary success across a wide range of industries – more so than matchers and takers. Grant concludes that ultimately, givers take all, but not just any givers, the strategic givers. So, If you've got the gift of the giver, but find your candle is burning thin, then this book teaches you how to give and still get ahead. In addition to his science-based approach, Grant offers practical advice on developing this attribute.

We'll briefly explore the three reciprocity styles. We'll also examine the importance of giving on our own terms, and why givers either lag behind or leap ahead. The significant insight is that although nice guys can finish last, they can also finish first. Generosity matters, but being generous isn't synonymous with being selfless. Strategic givers are thoughtful about how, when, and who they give to. Ultimately, they understand that every "no," frees them up for a "yes" that matters most.

Where Do You Fall on the Generosity Spectrum?

You're at work, and someone interrupts you, 'Sorry, can I ask a quick favor?'

What's your first thought when you hear this question? Is it, 'What's in it for me?' Or are you more the "quid pro quo" type, who thinks, 'I'll help you if you help me?' Perhaps you're simply happy to help, with no strings attached?

It turns out that our answer to this question reflects our "reciprocity style," which is the way we tend to approach our interactions with others.

According to Grant, there are three types of reciprocity styles: givers, takers, and matchers.

Takers are self-protective and adopt the "what can you do for me" mentality. They put themselves first, and aim to tilt reciprocity in their favor. Helping is a strategic move, where the benefits to themselves outweigh the costs. Matchers are fair and balanced, and believe in an even exchange. They believe success hinges on reciprocity and aim to give and receive in equal measure. Givers are the less common of the three reciprocity styles. They help out whenever they can, and their motivation comes down to altruism. Ultimately, they believe that only kindness matters, so they give without thinking about what they will get in return.

These styles are fluid states though, and we may shift our style to match the roles and relationships in different contexts of our lives. For example, we may be overly cautious at work, choose to be a matcher, or perhaps look out for our best interests and be a taker. At home, we may be a giver, giving with an open heart and with no expectations.

To be a matcher seems a safe way to live, but is this style the most effective and productive way to go about business? When it comes to the workplace, Grant turned to research to find out who ultimately succeeds: takers, matchers, or givers?

Givers, Matchers, and Takers in the Workplace

You may be wondering why givers are the most successful at work?

After years of studying the dynamics of success and productivity, Grant's

research demonstrates that givers can sink to the bottom of the success ladder across a wide range of occupations. Givers help others perform better, but sometimes to the detriment of their own success. Givers also tend to do more favors than they get in return, and can run out of time when completing their work.

In engineering, one study showed that out of a pool of 160 engineers, the least productive and effective engineers were givers. They made more errors, missed deadlines, and had the most unfinished tasks. A Belgian study of more than 600 medical students showed that the students with the lowest grades, had unusually high scores on "giver statements" such as, 'I like to help others,' and, 'I anticipate the needs of others.' One study shows that takers earn 14% more money than givers.

If givers are likely to be bottom of the success ladder, are matchers or takers at the top? Actually, neither. It turns out the medical students who scored the highest grades also reported to give the most. And engineers with the best performance reviews were those who gave the most. Grant's study looked at salespeople in North Carolina, and found that the least productive salespeople were givers, but so were the top performers. Givers at the top averaged 50% more annual revenue than the takers and matchers.

All three studies point to one surprising pattern. The worst performers and the best performers are givers. Takers and matches are more likely to land in the middle.

Research shows that takers quickly develop a reputation for putting others last. For this reason, they seldom succeed in building strong relationships and networks. Givers come out on top, because people trust and support them as they add value and enhance the success of

those around them. Givers succeed because out of the three interactive types, they form strong, trusting relationships that benefit them in the long run.

According to Grant's research, being a successful giver comes with many perks. Giving forms more robust relationships, increased happiness, and better performance at work. There's just one problem; research also shows that while some givers thrive at work, others burn out.

What separates givers at the top of the success ladder from those who get steam-rolled, burnt out, and left behind? The answer is simple. Givers who succeed in the workplace aren't selfless; they're "otherish."

Meet the “Otherish” Giver

What distinguishes givers who experience success from those who barely get out of the starting blocks?

Though they share the same reciprocity style, not all givers give in the same way.

Many people avoid being givers in the workplace for fear of being doormats, who are too empathic, trusting, or timid. Selfless qualities can stunt a giver's path to success. Selfless givers say "yes" to every request and drop everything at the drop of a hat to be of help. But the cost of being selfless all the time means they tend to fall behind on their work. Well hello there burnout.

However, the opposite of selfishness isn't selflessness. We can look after ourselves *and* do good for others. Grant says, 'Many people confuse

being nice with being helpful. A successful giver says, "I don't have to say yes all the time; I'll give when I can have the greatest impact, and I won't let it interfere with my productivity."

Grant's research illustrates that successful givers, aren't just more "other-orientated" than their peers, but are also more self-interested. They value the greater good, and they value their own needs and interests. They're both altruistic and ambitious; in other words, "otherish" givers are strategic about their giving. While they're just as much "givers" as the selfless givers, they've learned to navigate a world with matchers and takers successfully, so others don't take advantage of them.

This ability to add themselves to their priority list, prevents them from "generosity burnout." Selfless givers might be more generous, in principle, because they're constantly elevating other people's interests ahead of their own. However, Grant's data and supporting studies show that selfless givers are actually less generous in the long run, because they eventually run out of energy. They run out of time and lose their resources because they don't take enough care of themselves.

According to Grant, being otherish means being willing to give more than you receive and being able to keep an eye on your own interests in the rearview mirror. The key takeaway is that we can give and get ahead. However, to do so effectively, we need a few tricks up our sleeves. Let's explore how we can set boundaries for how, when, and who to help.

Specialize Favors

It's essential to give in ways you find enjoyable, and focus on recipients whose well-being matters to you.

Does giving deplete or energize you?

Grant notes one study where people were asked to give every day for two weeks, and document both what and why they gave. When participants felt that what they offered was of value, and to whom they gave mattered to them, they felt energized. On other days, where they gave from a place of duty or obligation, givers felt drained. Giving can either recharge or zap our batteries. When we give out of a sense of purpose and enjoyment, giving can energize us. But, when we give out of a sense of duty or obligation, we can feel depleted.

We can be thoughtful about how we give. If we align our giving with our interests and skills, giving can feel less stressful, and we may feel more valuable. According to Grant, 'Successful givers tend to be specialists rather than generalists. They focus on giving in a particular way they feel is aligned with their interests and expertise.'

Look at how you've been helping others over the past few days, months, and even years. What have you enjoyed? Where can you say, 'I really made a difference here?' Look for patterns. Notice what aligns with your skillset. Analyze what you're most frequently being asked for. What needs and contributions are taking up your time, and how can you align them with what you're good at, and where your contributions are most needed?

Adam Rifkin, according to Fortune magazine, is the 'world's most influential networker.' According to Grant, Rifkin, a software developer in

Silicon Valley, built his network slowly through 'small gestures and acts of kindness.' However, he gives in ways he finds enjoyable, and this is through connecting people. He has an extensive network and can introduce individuals who might benefit from meeting one another. Rifkin continually scans his online communities to connect engineers and entrepreneurs with business people in larger companies. Not only does this have high value for others, but it comes at a low personal cost to him. Arranging an introduction takes Rifkin less than five minutes to complete.

This brings us to the next trick. Can you pay it forward in five minutes?

Pay It Forward With the Five-Minute Favor

Our author's favorite strategy is the "five-minute favor," which he learned from Adam Rifkin. A five-minute favor is exactly what it says on the tin. It's small ways we can help out that take five minutes or less. A five-minute favor can be as simple as making introductions, giving small pieces of advice, or taking time to give someone feedback on an idea. We can find many small ways to add considerable value.

There's just one problem; small five-minute favors spread across our workweek can be distracting, and make it hard to judge whether we're actually helping.

Grant's solution is to batch favors, rather than spread them out. Our author cites a study of people who performed five random acts of kindness every week for six weeks. Those who condensed giving into one day per week, felt happier than those who scattered giving throughout the week.

Knowing when to give can help boost energy and still allow us to meet our deadlines; however, givers need to protect their time.

Limit Time Availability

When we freely give to others without blocking time to spend on our most important tasks, we kill our productivity.

Selfless givers spend too much time advancing other people's agendas and not enough time advancing their own. Give we must, but we also have to learn to strike a balance between giving to others, and giving to ourselves. Otherwise, Grant says, 'We miss deadlines and stay at the bottom of the success ladder.'

Grant's suggestion is to limit the time we make available for others' needs. He studied a team of engineers who were tasked with creating a laser printer under tight time constraints. The team developed a norm for reactive giving, and were always ready to help each other at the drop of a hat. However, frequent interruptions were delaying progress. They were helping others during the day and then working nights to finish their own tasks. This wasn't a sustainable solution.

Harvard Business School professor Leslie Perlow proposed an

experiment. She challenged the engineering team to set aside windows during which they could not interrupt one another. After some trial and error, they earmarked Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays from nine until five for quiet time, leaving the rest of the week for collaborative work and helping one another solve problems.

The result? Quiet time yielded above-average productivity for more than two-thirds of the engineers. Three months later, the team was able to launch the laser printer, right on schedule. Bear in mind; it was only the second time in the history of the division that a product had launched without delays. The vice-president credited the quiet time as the reason for the team's success.

Being an effective giver isn't about dropping everything, at any time, for any person. It's making sure that the benefits to others don't outweigh the cost to ourselves. Finally, let's look at why it matters who we give to.

Keep an Eye Out for Takers

Give to people who will pay it back, or pay it forward. In other words, watch out for takers.

A classic example of a taker is Kenneth Lay, a former Enron CEO. Apart from taking out loans that crippled the company, he sold off \$70 million in stocks in a well-timed effort to take care of himself before the company went bankrupt. Enron's demise left 20,000 employees jobless, most losing their life savings.

Although some takers are easy to spot, others, as Grant puts it, can be "fakers." So how do we spot a taker in a giver's clothing?

Takers typically promote themselves eagerly. They favor words such as "I" and "mine," rather than "we" and "ours." They treat people below them differently; they kiss up, and they kick down. They tend to be cold or short towards people they feel they can't benefit from, while unabashedly flattering towards people they think can help them get ahead. Faker takers create an excellent impression until they get what they want.

So the moral of the story is to give people a chance, but if they prove to takers, dare to draw the line.

In Conclusion

'No man is an island.' How we work together and willingly give time, energy and expertise, does matter in terms of success and productivity. And remember that the road to exhaustion is often paved with good intentions. Generosity without reciprocity can also lead to burnout, so while we shouldn't underestimate the power of generosity, the challenge is in how we give. How we give mustn't come with the tradeoff of sacrificing our well-being and success.

In this landmark book, *Give and Take*, Grant suggests practical ways to become a strategic giver. To give and still get ahead, we need to be more intentional about how, when, and who we help. Grant advises us on adopting a more flexible reciprocity style and using a matcher style at times, especially with a taker. However, what makes his work revolutionary is that he shows us that altruism matters and plays a

significant role in determining our success.

Now that we know that generosity is key to workplace success, how can we use our next five minutes? And, most importantly, how can we make sure that the nice guys always win?