Are you a giver, a matcher, or a taker?

People fit into one of three reciprocity styles. **Givers** like to give more than they get, paying attention to what others need. **Takers** like to get more than they give, seeing the world as a competitive place and primarily looking out for themselves. And **matchers** balance and give on a quid pro quo basis, willing to exchange favors but careful about not being exploited.

Of these 3 styles, which do you think tends to be the most successful? When surveyed, most people believe the takers and matchers come out on top. Givers just seem too altruistic to push themselves ahead.

In *Give and Take*, Wharton professor Adam Grant argues that **givers are actually the most successful of the 3 types**. Givers build larger, more supportive networks; they inspire the most creativity from their colleagues; and they achieve the most successful negotiations. Givers find ways to grow the pie and take their share of it.

And yet givers also risk becoming spineless doormats. You may know of a pushover who gives in to every demand, at cost to his or her own well-being. There are strong strategies to protect against this.

In this *Give and Take* summary, you'll learn why givers are so successful, why takers are punished by society for bad behavior, and how givers can avoid pitfalls that drag them down.
1-Page Summary of Give and Take

Here is a reference for the most important concepts in Give and Take. To get more color on these points and illustrative anecdotes, read through this Give and Take summary in full.

- there are 3 reciprocity styles. Takers like to receive more than they give. Matchers balance and give on a quid pro quo basis. Givers like to give more than they get.
- **professionally, most people tend to be matchers**, partly because they believe the workplace is zero sum, partly because they're skeptical of takers and don't want to make themselves vulnerable. This can create a pernicious vicious cycle leading to bad work culture.
- givers end up more successful by **building better reputations and more useful networks**. Increasingly true as economies shift to collaborative knowledge work.
- giving gives you an advantage because **you can't predict who's going to be helpful to you in the future**. This means some people are undervalued by takers-matchers at present. If you help these people, they will be grateful. Givers tend to see potential in all people as diamonds in the rough.
- givers focus on the success of the group rather than the self. This **inspires trust in their motives** and creates a safe space where ideas are shared without fear of exploitation (where a taker would claim credit) or retaliation (where a taker may reflexively shoot it down). Takers create the opposite reaction
  - the givers also earn "idiosyncracy credits" where their controversial ideas may be given more hearing time, since listeners know the givers have the group's interests at heart
- giving is contagious. **Giving seems to create a safe space in a group, where people are comfortable adopting giving behaviors knowing that takers won't exploit them.** Since most people are matchers, they reciprocate to the network.
  - in contrast, a bad taker apple can spoil the batch. Takers can spur zero-sum behaviors that drag the whole group down, and people are wary of sharing ideas out of fear of exploitation
  - promote a giving culture by publicly rewarding giving behaviors; creating a reciprocity ring; setting low bars for giving; making giving behavior public and expected. Takers will have to cooperate or appear unhelpful, which threatens their well-being later.
- givers practice **powerless communication** by asking questions, signaling vulnerability, and seeking advice. This reduces ego tensions, helps them gather more information, and makes for more effective sales and negotiations.
  - takers practice powerful communication to dominate the scenario, which makes them seem more authoritative but closes counterparties off from fear of retribution.
  - however, powerful communication works when listeners are dutiful followers (picture Steve Jobs speaking powerfully to Apple fans)
- self-interest and other-interest do not lie on the same spectrum. **You can be motivated by both self-interest and other-interest**, practicing "otherish giving." This allows givers to avoid being doormats and giving too much of themselves when giving.
- **"generous tit for tat"** is an effective stance to adopt as a giver. Start out with trust, punish when competed against, but forgive once in a while to allow redemption of behavior. Pure tit for tat can
cause a vicious cycle of competition after a mishap
• giving leads to potential pitfalls, each with remedies:
  ○ givers may be prone to sunk cost fallacy, where they throw good money after bad. But in reality they tend to accept disconfirming evidence more than takers, who want to be right all the time and see mistakes as ego threats. (Michael Jordan example of not admitting he made a bad draft pick)
  ○ givers are prone to burnout if they practice selfless giving. To reduce this, make the impact of the giving clear; chunk giving into fewer time slots
  ○ givers tend not to advocate for themselves for fear of offending the other party. They are more effective when advocating for other people (like family or a cause) since this aligns with their giving standpoint. Also, successful givers take people's objective perspectives rather than empathizing with their feelings.
• takers are punished societally through spreading of a bad reputation or active punishment (withholding of information, exclusion). The Internet makes taker reputations hard to reverse.
• some takers try to disguise as givers, but they can sometimes be identified by poor behavior to subordinates and egotistical speech.
• demeanor and agreeableness is not a reliable signal of giving behavior. There are disagreeable givers and agreeable takers.
• takers tend to take credit because they suffer responsibility bias and cannot cross the perspective gap to their teammates. They see only their pain and contributions, and not those of others.
  ○ avoid this by picturing what your teammates are suffering through, and find analogous situations from your past

Chapter 1: Good Returns

The Dangers and Rewards of Giving More Than You Get

People fall into one of 3 groups for their stance on reciprocity:

• **Takers** like to get more than they give. They feel the world is a zero-sum game, for them to win means others must lose. They self-promote and make sure they get credit. They help others strategically, when the benefits to them outweigh their personal costs.
• **Givers** like to give more than they get. They help others when the benefits to *others* exceeds their personal costs.
• **Matchers** like to balance and giving exactly, practicing quid pro quo.

Outside the workplace, giving is quite common, especially in marriages and friendships. But in the workplace, people tend to adopt a matcher style.

The roles are fluid. You may act like a taker when negotiating a job offer, a giver when mentoring an intern, and a matcher when sharing information with a colleague.

Interestingly, according to *Give and Take*, both the worst and the best performers in a firm tend to be
**givers.** The givers at the bottom tend to give away too much time to get their work done, or were too nice to customers. But givers also fill out the top ranks.

This tends to be true across industries, from medical school students, to engineering and salespeople.

In true zero-sum interactions, giving rarely pays off. **But most of life isn’t zero-sum.** Givers take some time to build goodwill, but eventually their reputations and network build their success in a virtuous cycle way.

Example: in the first year of medical school, givers earned lower grades. Here, helping other students meant necessarily that they earned lower on the scoring curve. But in later clinical years, where teamwork is necessary, the givers perform better with their peers and patients.

Giving is valued. In the majority of the world’s cultures, survey takers rated giving as their most important value, above wealth, power, and pleasure. People prefer service providers (doctors, lawyers, teachers) who are givers to them, who will contribute value without claiming it back.

But givers are sometimes afraid of giving in the workplace, as it may signal weakness or naivete. When people perceive the workplace as zero-sum and other people as matchers, they want to respond in kind. This perpetuates a matching culture.

President Lincoln was a giver, known to be among the least self-centered US presidents. In his first Senate run, he gave up his 2nd place position to support the 3rd place candidate to defeat the 1st place candidate (he believed this was better for the state). When he won the presidency, Lincoln gave cabinet seats to his Republican opponents, where a matcher might have reciprocated allies’ support by appointing them, and a taker would have appointed “yes men” to build his power. Lincoln believed he had “no right to deprive the country” of the services of the best men.

Venture capitalist David Hornik was cited as a main example of an inveterate giver. His reputation for being hardworking and helpful gives him a signing rate of 90%, compared to an average 50%. Examples of his giving include starting a blog and openly describing how venture capital works (thus giving away trade secrets and weakening their position over companies), and running a conference called The Lobby where other VC firms were invited to meet potential investee companies. He creates the world he wants to live in.

**Give and Take** covers three aims:

- Explain why giving is more successful and less dangerous than most believe
- Separate givers at the top and bottom of the success ladder
- Show what’s unique about the giving style of success, compared to taking and matching

[Reputation is important here – people will come to you with a preconception of what you’re there for, and match your style. If you’re known to be a taker, people will be wary of your every action and question your motives. If you’re known as a matcher, people will come to you only if they feel like they have something equal to offer. Let your reputation precede you.]
Chapter 2: The Peacock and the Panda

How Givers, Takers, and Matchers Build Networks

Networks provide private information, diverse skills, and power. As we'll explain in this Give and Take summary, givers tend to create more helpful networks than matchers or takers.

Weak Ties and Dormant Ties

The core of why giving works seems to work is that you can’t perfectly predict who will be useful to you in the future. Someone you help might unpredictably become your boss or client in the future. If you selectively target only people you believe will help you, you ignore all the unproven people whose connections would have turned out to be helpful. Plus, because most people professionally tend to be matchers, the “lower status” people you help as a giver tend to really appreciate your giving.

Takers and matchers take advantage of the reciprocity tendency. They offer favors to people whose help they want in the future. But there are two downsides. First, the recipients often feel like they’re being manipulated. This ends up feeling like a transaction more than a meaningful gesture. Second, matchers tend to build smaller networks than givers or takers, because they help only people for whom there is an immediate benefit. Thus, matchers tend to have a smaller network of quid pro quo ties.

Surprisingly, people are much more likely to benefit from weak ties than from strong ties (like your close colleagues and best friends). Strong ties tend to be people belonging to the same group whom you interact with consistently, thus limiting access to new ideas. In contrast, weak ties provide access to information and people from different niches, facilitating creation of new leads. [Read about how weak ties promote social movements in the book The Power of Habit.]

Adam Grant introduces a type of a weak tie – a dormant tie, someone whom you used to see often but have since lost touch with. Givers and takers both tend to have more dormant ties than matchers, as explained above.

But takers and matchers are disadvantaged in reactivating dormant ties. Takers may have carried a bad reputation with them, prompting even matchers and givers to punish the taker. Matchers have an easier time because there’s less ill will. But they feel uncomfortable reaching out to weak ties, because they may already owe a debt to the weak tie, dislike the creation of a debt, or never have developed a warm trusting relationship rather than a transactional one.

In contrast, givers have major advantages in reconnecting. Givers a history of helping you, so you feel happy when they contact you again. Givers tend to be asking for help for someone else, not themselves, prompting people to add value rather than trade value. Also, since most people tend to prefer justice, they’ll reward givers who have a reputation of acting generously to others.
Adam Rifkin, SuperGiver

Entrepreneur Adam Rifkin was identified as the top connected person by Fortune by virtue of the most LinkedIn connections to the top 500 CEOs and other influential people. He built this network over decades, developing with every small gesture of kindness and a genuine desire to help people. For instance, Rifkin was a fan of Blogger, founded by Ev Williams. When Blogger ran out of money, he offered a contract to Ev to build something and keep Blogger afloat. Ev went on to co-found Twitter. A matcher wouldn’t necessarily appreciate the value of helping a sinking startup. In another example, Rifkin was connected to a venture capitalist through a connection made 4 years earlier, when he helped a punk rock fan (who happened to be the founder of search engine Excite). Adam Grant gives Rifkin as a clear success case of a giver.

He now runs 106 miles, a network of entrepreneurs, and he gleefully connects people in the group and answers questions even from the most hapless. As a last small example, he has written 265 LinkedIn recommendations for others, compared to 49 inbound ones. He lives by a maxim: the five-minute favor. “You should be willing to do something that will take you five minutes or less for anybody.”

Giving is Contagious

Studies show that giving is contagious. The social network experts Fowler/Christakis found that a giver can influence members of their group to give in the future, even when interacting with people who weren’t present in the original group. The experiment was a cash giving scenario, where each person in a group of 4 had two choices: 1) receive $3 and give $0 to everyone else; 2) give $2 to all members of the group. At the end of each round, the behaviors are revealed.

In this scenario, all people are better off if everyone gives. But giving is a risky strategy, as if you’re a giver in a group of takers, you perform the worst. Despite this, some people were consistent givers, and this inspired other group members to give. These consistent givers ended up with 26% more money than participants from groups without a consistent giver. Despite earning less on each personal transaction, they benefited overall by inspiring others to give to him and each other.

Similarly, in ordinary life, giving inspires more giving from others, and ultimately some of this giving leads back to you. Adam Rifkin actively pushes people he’s helped to give to other people, creating a pay-it-forward effect.

[This is the inverse of the monkey ladder experiment, where a ladder was placed with a group of monkeys. If a monkey climbed the ladder, all the monkeys were doused with water. They quickly learned not to climb the ladder, and they quickly discouraged any monkey that tried to climb. Then, monkeys in the original group were swapped out for new ones that were never doused, but were conditioned to beat any monkey that climbed. Eventually the behavior persisted even with monkeys that never knew water was in the picture. This may be apocryphal, but it illustrates the power of continuous feed-forward effects.]
[Being a giver gives you first mover advantage with matchers. A matcher would rarely initiate a favor without knowing what favor she wants in return. But a giver kicks off the cycle and establishes trust, which invites the good spirits of the matcher.]

Diagnosing Takers Disguising as Givers

Takers tend to build connections only to gain favors, without caring about reciprocating. To avoid rejection, takers become good fakers. How do you tell a false taker?

- They kiss up to superiors but treat peers and subordinates poorly (as they believe these people have nothing to contribute).
- They tend to speak in a self-absorbed way, using singular pronouns like I vs plural pronouns like we. In a study of CEOs, takers used 39% singular pronouns, where the average was 21%.
- They put themselves front and center on websites and annual reports.
- Taker CEOs tend to earn more money than other senior executives in their companies. Taker CEOs earn 3x the salary and 7x stock of the next best person, compared to 1.5x and 2.5x respectively on average.

With public Facebook profiles, it’s easier to research fake takers. Takers tend to post more self-promoting information, feature arrogant quotes, rack up more Facebook friends to get favors, and post vainer pictures of themselves.

On the surface, Ken Lay of Enron looked like a giver. He set up a family foundation, gave $2.5 million to nonprofits, and donated 1% of his company’s profits. But reality showed he was actually a taker, having condoned schemes that inflated earnings and hid losses. How could you have detected taking behavior before this? Adam Grant presents this evidence:

- When giving a tour of Wall Street, he recruited employees to appear to be busy traders in an otherwise empty floor. These employees made fake phone calls. In so doing, Lay asked his subordinates to forsake their integrity for his gain, giving them a terrible experience with their manager.
- Compare his photo in the shareholders’ annual reports to that of another company's CEO:
Punishing Takers

Since most people are matchers, people who feel exploited by takers want to see justice served, and will seek the downfall of takers. **They circulate reputational information**, signaling caution to others. Takers eventually run out of bridges that they have burnt or have been closed off.

The Kahneman ultimatum game studies show the desire for fairness. Subjects sat across a stranger who had been given $10. The stranger proposed a split with the subject – the subject gets $2, the stranger keeps $8. There is no bargaining – it’s an ultimatum. The subject can take the offer, or reject and both get nothing. The rational thing to do is to keep the free money – after all, $2 is better than $0. But most people reject the offer, leaving both with no money but the subject with dignity intact.

In a related study, people had a choice of splitting $12 evenly with a taker who had public information of making unfair deals in the past, or of splitting $10 with a matcher. Over 80% of people chose to take the latter deal, even though they would have been better off getting the $6 themselves. This reflects a strong reciprocity tendency – people want justice, and they prefer to work with fair people.

**Quotes**

“**The true measure of a man is how he treats someone who can do him absolutely no good.**” – Samuel Johnson

Says LinkedIn founder Reid Hoffman: “The more altruistic your attitude, the more benefits you will gain from the relationship. If you set out to help others, you will rapidly reinforce your own reputation and expand your universe of possibilities.” [In this case, **reciprocation, social proof, and liking tendencies** all contribute toward givers having more success.]
Chapter 3: The Ripple Effect

Collaboration and the Dynamics of Giving and Taking Credit

According to *Give and Take*, Americans tend to see independence as strength, and interdependence as weakness. Takers tend to see themselves as superior to others and collaboration as opening vulnerabilities to being overtaken.

Givers focus on achieving the goals of the group and see collaboration as harnessing the best of multiple people. They take on tasks that are in the best interest of the group and not necessarily of themselves. This isn’t necessarily purely altruistic – givers understand that the best thing for themselves is for their group to perform as well as possible.

[In Ben Horowitz’s terms, “two percent of zero is zero.” If you’re a taker and fight for your share but the team fails, you own two percent of nothing.]

Benefits of Giving in Collaboration

Evidence in *Give and Take* shows that the more giving group members are, the more successful they tend to be in group performance and individual raises. There are a few reasons for this.

When givers show they care more about the group, they signal that they care less about themselves and intra-competition. In turn, they earn their collaborators’ respect and trust, which opens bandwidth of collaboration. Takers no longer feel competitive with a giver, matchers feel they owe a giver, and givers identify with a giver.

As described in the last chapter of this *Give and Take* summary, giving and taking are both contagious. Because many people are matchers and use tit-for-tat strategies, adding takers to the mix promotes competitive and zero-sum behaviors that can drag the whole group down. People are wary of sharing creative ideas for fear of being exploited – indeed, *taking behavior tends to lower creativity*.

But adding givers to the group can push the whole group to focus on the overall goals and increase collaboration. *Among predominantly givers, people can feel more comfortable opening up and sharing ideas*, building psychological safety. It feels safe to exchange information in an environment where you won’t be punished by bad actors.

Giving also increases reception to your personal ideas. *Givers earn “idiosyncrasy credits” – positive impressions that allow a giver to deviate from group norms or expectations*. When givers voice opinions, others are less entrenched in a competitive mood and can be more objective about ideas. When such an idea can threaten the security of other team members, it’s understood that the giver is posing an idea primarily for the sake of the team, not for her own ego. This also applies to feedback – the recipient
understands the giver wants her to succeed, rather than giving feedback to harm.

In contrast, when takers voice opinions, jealousy can spur collaborators to shoot them down in fear of competition or out of punishment for previous bad behavior. And when takers express threatening ideas or give constructive feedback, others can be skeptical of motives and reflexively dismiss it as self-serving.

**Success Requires the Team**

Much knowledge work relies on collaboration and working with a set of particular team members. It’s not as much a solo game where a superstar can join another team and magically make things work.

One study described in *Give and Take* looked at cardiac surgeons who performed procedures at multiple hospitals. Over time, mortality rate for a given surgeon improved only at the specific hospital where they practiced – the surgeon’s general expertise didn’t carry over to other hospitals where she practiced. In other words, every procedure the surgeon performed at one hospital lowered the mortality risk at that hospital. But when that surgeon switched to a different hospital, the mortality risk “reset.” This suggested that the surgeon was adapting to the particular team and environment, rather than developing a general skill.

Similarly, investment banks often recruit star analysts from other firms. These top analysts earn 7 digits per year and are highly coveted. A given top analyst had a 10% chance of being ranked first when staying at the same firm. When moving to a different firm alone, performance dropped and their chance of ranking first was 5%. But star analysts who moved with their teams showed no decline in performance, keeping a 10% chance of being ranked first.

Both studies suggest that the supposed center of innovation – the surgeon and the star analyst – relies on their colleagues for top performance.

**Geniuses vs Genius Makers**

A 1958 study collected the top 40 creative architects (by surveyed opinion) and 84 successful but uncreative architects, and studied the groups psychologically. They found that the ordinary architects were more likely to be givers, showing good character and sympathetic concern. The creative architects were more “demanding, aggressive, and self-centered.” Later studies among scientists showed similar results, agreeing to statements like “I tend to slight the contributions of others and take undue credit for myself.”

Because takers tend to be self-confident and care less about what others think, they can push original ideas against opposition. But that also come with costs.

Adam Grant spends much of this *Give and Take* chapter on portraying two people on opposite sides of
the spectrum: Frank Lloyd Wright as a taker, and former *Simpsons* writer George Meyer as a giver.

Wright is recognized as one of the greatest architects of all time, but he was notoriously difficult to work with. He refused to pay his apprentices and demanded that his name be featured as lead architect on their designs. [This also recalls how scientists treat grad students.] When his son John asked to be paid for his work as an assistant, Wright gave a bill itemizing his costs since birth. For his famous Fallingwater house, Wright ignored his client's request to see the waterfall from the house, designed one that sat on top of the waterfall, and charged triple the contract. (A giver likely would not have contravened his client’s wishes so egregiously.)

His taker stance bolstered his prestige and gave him courage to push original controversial ideas, but it came at a cost. Few of his hundreds of apprentices became successful architects – the best apprentices quit after feeling exploited. He left a legacy of his own work, but he didn't boost the careers of followers.

George Meyer, in contrast, is a giver. As a writer on *Saturday Night Live*, he would take on the grunt work of writing sketches for less glamorous guests – “I just wanted to be a good soldier.” As a writer on *The Simpsons*, he worked more on rewriting other people’s first drafts, rather than pushing his own first drafts (which would have his name credited front and center). He’s shaped more than 300 episodes but credited as a writer on only 12, despite the consensus among writers that he was responsible for many of the jokes. Adam Grant argues that despite his relative anonymity for many years, he eventually got deserved credit through a feature in *The New Yorker* and multiple Emmys.

And in contrast to Wright, Meyer has helped the careers of many writers who are universally grateful. These include actor Bob Odenkirk and *Fresh Prince* creator Andy Borowitz.

Adam Grant gives Jonas Salk as another example of a taker. He was publicly credited as a miracle worker in polio vaccine development, but at an important press conference, Jonas Salk refused to acknowledge the work of colleagues and his lab researchers. This snub alienated his colleagues and the overall scientific industry, which viewed it as “the most un-collegial thing that you can imagine.” He in turn never won a Nobel prize and was never elected to the National Academy of Sciences (retribution for taker behavior). Salk, of course, viewed the rest of the world as jealous.

[In my view, this example isn't the most convincing. I get how Meyer is an admirable person whose qualities we should emulate. But readers of self-improvement books like *Give and Take* tend to want more success, and Meyer seemed to be a giver at some personal cost and reputation. How many readers have heard of George Meyer, and how many of Frank Lloyd Wright?

Adam Grant could have done better by portraying a more prestigious giver like Y Combinator founder Paul Graham or Google co-founder Larry Page, to show that giving doesn’t necessarily compromise success.]

**Why Takers Act Poorly**

Takers don’t always maliciously and consciously take effort away from people. People generally want to
think of themselves as fair and good. Rather, it can be due to a lack of effective empathy, which distorts their view of the world.

Imagine you and your partner are asked about how much you each contribute to the relationship, from 0 to 100 percent. Three of four couples add up their personal contributions to more than 100%.

This is the responsibility bias: we exaggerate our contributions relative to those of others. This happens partly because of ego (we want to glorify ourselves) but also because of information discrepancy: our own actions are far more salient to us than other people’s actions. For example, when itemizing each partner’s contributions, people tend to list 11 of their own but only 8 of their partner’s.

Wright and Salk, for instance, remembered how hard they toiled to generate the successes, but they hadn’t viscerally experienced the pain of their subordinates.

There is an antidote to responsibility bias: list what your partner has contributed before you estimate your own contribution. When employees first think about how much their bosses have helped them before valuing their own contributions, they double the % of their bosses’ contributions, from 17% to 33%. Similarly, in group work, considering others’ contributions first brings the sum of individual contribution estimates down from 140% to 123%. [This is part of the reason feeling grateful for things can lead to success – see Tools of Titans.]

Givers tend to default to recognizing the value of what other people contribute first, and to see themselves as assisting the capabilities of others.

The Perspective Gap

The chasm of empathy causing responsibility bias is called the perspective gap. When we’re not currently experiencing an intense state, we underestimate how much it’s affecting us or others. Doctors consistently think their patients are feeling less pain than the patients themselves rate. When you have your arm in a bucket of ice water, you predict that being in cold will be 14% more painful than someone with an arm in a bucket of warm water. And there is a fast decay effect – someone who is exposed to cold water and then 10 minutes of warmth rate cold pain as though they had never experienced the cold water.

Takers rarely cross the perspective gap. Narcissistically, they focus on their own viewpoints and rarely see how others are reacting to their ideas. Takers project their own feelings on other people, and behave in accordance to how the takers would like to be treated.

For example, gift givers routinely overestimate how much recipients enjoy off-registry gifts. Stuck in their own frames of reference, gift givers give what they would prefer themselves, rather than accurately appreciating what the recipient would enjoy. If you love Dutch ovens, you think others would love them too; but if they loved them that much, the recipient would have put Dutch ovens on the registry.

[Insidiously, takers may see themselves as far more empathetic than they really are (because their ego would not let them believe they’re manipulative). When empathizing with another person, a taker
believes she is imagining how the other party is feeling. But in reality the taker is imagining how the taker would feel in that situation. This is a false, self-centered empathy. Thus narcissists tend to see themselves as righteous and doing nothing wrong, and when others react poorly, narcissists may dismiss the insulted parties as unlikeable rather than assigning blame to the self.

This also suggests that empathy really requires an accurate understanding of the other person’s state. **You must fully inhabit the other person’s mind and assume nothing that is not proven.**

Other-centered empathy develops between 14 months and 18 months of age. Toddlers are given two bowls, one with crackers and another with broccoli. They overwhelmingly personally prefer crackers. They then watch a researcher express disgust while eating crackers and happiness while eating broccoli. The researcher then asks for food. 87% of 14-month-olds erroneously shared the crackers, while 31% of 18-month-olds did.

Over age, some people may naturally incline toward this empathy more than others. Givers tend to actively empathize with the other party. Before giving feedback, comedic writer George Meyer reflects on his past feelings of feeling eviscerated when being rewritten.

**Chapter 4: Finding the Diamond in the Rough**

**The Fact and Fiction of Recognizing Potential**

Assessing future potential is difficult. As discussed above, matchers and takers have a disadvantage in creating valuable networks – they seek out only people who can benefit them today. This ignores undervalued people who blossom into great success, whom givers help without expectation of return. *Give and Take* discusses why givers tend to be better judges and developers of talent.

**The Pygmalion Effect – Self-fulfilling Prophecies of Potential**

Confounding the potential problem is the Pygmalion effect – a self-fulfilling prophecy where having higher expectations about a person leads to performance increases in that person.

This effect has been experimented with in a wide range of professional and educational settings. Usually the experiment is conducted by having all students take a faux exam, then randomly assigning a percentage of students into a false “high potential group.” Instructors are then told which students were identified as high potential.

Repeatedly, the falsely labeled “high potential” or “bloomers” achieve better gains. In grade school students, bloomers gained ten IQ points more than their peers over 2 years. In the military, high potential trainees do better on expertise tests and weapons evaluations. In the workplace, new employees whose managers are told of their high promise receive higher performance ratings. [The size of the effect is]
around $d = 0.5 \text{ to } d = 1.13$, depending on parameters. The effect is stronger when there are initially low expectations (like in problem students), when subjects are men, and in the military.

The Pygmalion effect occurs because the teacher reacts differently to a person based on her expectations. To someone of high promise, a teacher sets higher expectations, communicates more warmly, calls to answer more often, gives more advice and feedback, and attributes failure to the task rather than the person. The student responds to positivity, setting into place a positive feedback loop that leads to a sustained self-fulfilling prophecy.

In contrast, to someone of low promise, a teacher does the inverse: she attributes failure to the person’s low promise, gives fewer chances to succeed, and gives less feedback (likely out of belief the advice will be wasted). Similarly, this leads to a vicious cycle where the student feels less motivated, and each progressive failure is more evidence of low promise.

### Takers, Givers, and the Pygmalion Effect

So it’s shown that trainees develop differently in response to the teachers’ beliefs. How do takers, matchers, and givers perform differently in this framework?

**Takers assume that most people are takers and thus place little trust in other people.** When they see someone with high performance, they see this person as a threat, which prevents them from wholeheartedly supporting the person. Furthermore, takers tend to dismiss low performers as not possibly being able to help the taker. This creates vicious cycles where takers fail to provide encouraging support.

Matchers value reciprocity, so when they see someone of high potential, they do provide support in hopes of returned favors later. But **Matchers tend to wait to see evidence of performance before making the investment.** Thus, they lose opportunities to help people who don’t immediately show talent.

Givers don’t wait for evidence. **By default, givers tend to be optimistic and see everyone as bloomers.** All people are diamonds in the rough until proven otherwise. Furthermore, givers don’t see high potential people as threatening. Givers provide encouraging support broadly. Critically, they can recognize “undervalued” people who are ignored by takers and matchers but, with the right environment, can blossom.

### Talent Is Overrated – Grit is Important

One reason takers and matchers tend to undervalue potential is that they overemphasize current performance and talent. After all, they want to extract value now.

Instead, research has shown that orthogonal character traits like interest and grit make a big difference. Interest drives people to develop skill in the first place. And grit keeps them pushing through setbacks and difficulties.
Both character traits can be nurtured by early teachers who are caring and patient. Teachers who can spark the interest and provide positive experiences set the foundation for developing skill. Then teachers who set high expectations and push them past limits inculcate grit.

**Givers tend to be these supportive teachers.** Because givers signal that they care about the student’s growth, students respond better to teaching feedback and don’t question the teacher’s motives.

Furthermore, givers tend to be more gritty themselves, as they’re spurred on by the good of the group to put in more than they’d be willing to do for themselves.

[For more on grit, read my detailed summary of Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance.]

If takers know this, will they simply select on grit rather than current performance? Possibly, but they may be at a disadvantage by not creating the environment that nurtures talent growth.

### Avoiding Sunk Cost Fallacy

Givers invest a lot of time in developing people. But givers don’t have a magical Midas touch – not all trainees have the talent or the grit to reach their potential.

So with limited time, how can givers focus on people with true promise? And how do they avoid the escalation of commitment to investment in a person?

Escalation of commitment is a powerful force that pushes people to throw good money after bad. There are four factors here:

- **Ego threat** – the biggest factor. If I don’t keep investing, I’ll look and feel like a fool.
- **Sunk cost fallacy** – you weigh your past losses in your decisionmaking, rather than re-initiating a decision. For example, if you’ve bought 2 tickets for $200 but realize you don’t want to go to the show for 4 hours, the rational decision is to consider whether you want to waste 4 hours for $0.
- **Anticipated regret** – will I be sorry that I didn’t give this another chance?
- **Project completion** – a desire to follow through and finish

In many cases, escalation of commitment to a bad decision is worse for the group, but better in the short-term for the individual (in terms of disguising mistakes and massaging ego).

**Takers are more vulnerable to ego threat than givers are.** They’re concerned about protecting their reputation, not about the health of the organization. Cutting off a bad investment makes them look foolish and can incur big personal costs like a loss of a promotion. Thus continuing the bad investment allows the taker to continue hiding the prospect of failure.

In contrast, givers are more concerned about achieving the goals of the group than about ego. Thus, **givers are more willing to admit personal mistakes and de-escalate commitment.** Studies show that people make more accurate decisions when they’re deciding on behalf of others rather than themselves.
Givers do this naturally.

Furthermore, **takers tend to discount constructive feedback that harms their ego**. In an experiment, subjects were identified as givers or takers, then made decisions on how to solve problems. All participants received a random score indicating they were below or above average, then given a suggestion to delegate more. When takers believed they were above average, they delegated 30% more often; but when they believed they were below average, they delegated only 15% as often. In contrast, givers delegated 30% more often regardless of the feedback.

By avoiding constructive feedback, takers continuously entrench into their former decisions, as doing otherwise would deflate their ego in being correct. **Takers want to be the smartest people in the room.** In contrast, givers care about the performance of the group and focus more on the organizational consequences of their decisions. Thus, they take in as much data and disconfirming evidence as they can to make better decisions, even at the short term expense of their ego and reputation.

**Inman vs Jordan in Basketball Scouting**

Give and Take uses two well-known basketball figures to illustrate the talent-developing differences between givers and takers. Stu Inman was a basketball scout for the Portland Trail Blazers and is seen as key to building the team that won the championship in 1977. Adam Grant cites Inman’s classic giver behaviors. As a college coach, he cared about talent development and made room for gritty players even if they lacked talent. As an NBA scout, he fought common wisdom and used psychological analyses to find gritty players, rather than focusing on upfront performance. This led to picks like Bill Walton and Clyde Drexler.

They had their share of mistaken picks. But **Inman was receptive to negative feedback and to admitting his mistakes**. After making bad picks, other NBA teams tended to play their picks more than they should have, in an effort to prove their ego correct and out of ego-protecting denial that they had made a mistake. In contrast, the Blazers played their bad picks less than average, thus de-escalating their commitment.

In contrast, Michael Jordan, despite being the best known basketball player of all time, was a classic taker on and off the court. While playing, he was known as being egotistical and selfish. He bristled under constructive feedback and was criticized at his Hall of Fame speech for thanking few people and excoriating his doubters.

As an executive for the Washington Wizards, Jordan made a bad first pick in Kwame Brown, who never lived up to potential. **Brown’s failure was mean a huge blow to Jordan’s ego.** Jordan un-retired to play on the Wizards alongside Brown, and he “ritually reduced Brown to tears.” Without success, Jordan was fired from the Wizards, but he didn’t let it go. When Jordan owned the Charlotte Bobcats, he signed Brown again. The Bobcats gave Brown more minutes than ever, but he struggled to thrive. Jordan kept throwing good money after bad, unable to admit his mistake and stinging under the increasing criticisms about his management.
Chapter 5: The Power of Powerless Communication

How to Be Modest and Influence People

There are two modes of communication: powerful communication and powerless communication.

**Powerful communication** tries to establish dominance, and takers are attracted to this style. They speak loudly and forcefully, express certainty, promote accomplishments, and have large body language. Picture a military general issuing orders.

**Powerless communication** tries to build prestige and admiration, and givers are attracted to this style. Powerless communicators speak less aggressively and assertively, express doubt by using disclaimers and hesitations (“um”, “sorta,” “this may be a bad idea, but”), signal vulnerability, ask questions, and rely on advice. Picture a warm, supportive teacher.

In *Give and Take*, Adam Grant examines how givers and powerless communicators succeed in four areas: presenting, selling, persuading, and negotiating. **In sum, powerless communication is effective because people are naturally skeptical of intentions, bristle at being ordered around, and have their own egos to protect. By asking questions and indicating vulnerability, givers become approachable, show reception to new ideas, and learn new information that helps them persuade.**

**Presenting**

When giving a presentation, revealing vulnerability and humanity make you approachable and get people to empathize with you. **Givers are interested in helping others, not in establishing dominance, so they’re not afraid to show vulnerability.**

In contrast, takers worry that showing vulnerability will limit their ability to gain dominance. Their powerful communication, however, can clash with other people who want to assert dominance, or when the audience is skeptical of your influence, and the message gets lost.

Powerless communication only works, however, if you signal your competence in other ways, such as credentials or the content of your speech. If you’re competent and vulnerable, audiences like you more. But if you’re incompetent and vulnerable, audiences like you less. This is the **pratfall effect**. In other words, mistakes amplify the audience’s prior conception about you.

When presenting to senior military officers, Adam Grant started his presentation with a powerless joke: “I know what you’re thinking: what can I possibly learn from a professor who’s twelve years old?” This approach led to much better reception compared to a powerful presentation of his credentials.
Selling

Picture a stereotype of a salesperson, and you may picture a hard-charging, gregarious back-slapper who pushes you down a list of features and won’t take no for an answer.

It turns out [givers are the most effective salespeople](https://www.allencheng.com), showing higher results across industries like insurance and pharmaceuticals. Givers want to help their customers solve their problems, and they use powerless communication to achieve it. In sales, givers ask lots of questions to understand the clients’ scenario, customize a solution to best match the client’s needs, then allow the client to make her own conclusion.

**Tactically, asking questions allows a salesperson to unearth new customer needs** and use cases that wouldn’t have been discovered through a brute force one-size-fits-all approach. Adam Grant gives an example of an optician who approached a woman skeptical of buying expensive multifocal glasses. After asking questions about her daily sight problems and her potential use cases, the optician realizes she has a misconception that the glasses can only be used part of the day. He ultimately makes the sale.

Powerless communication in sales also works because, as a consumer, you’re flooded with strong messaging all day, from advertisers to politicians, and when you hear a powerful sales pitch, you tend to get suspicious. You don’t want to be tricked, and you prefer not feeling manipulated. A giving, powerless approach guides you to making your own conclusions.

A lawyer says, “the art of advocacy is to lead you to my conclusion on your terms. I want you to form your own conclusions: you’ll hold on to them more strongly. I try to walk jurors up to that line, drop them off, and let them make up their own minds.”

Related point: **people love talking about themselves.** The more you talk in a group, the more you think you’ve learned about the group, even though the information exchange was unilateral. Thus by asking questions, givers inspire joy in the talker and enable introspection leading to a conclusion.

Persuading

In collaborative work, powerless communication provides a safe space for new ideas. Asking questions and using powerless speech markers like “may” and “possibly” **invite contrary opinions and signal a willingness to defer.** From a classic giver point of view, this signals that the speaker cares primarily about the goals of the group, rather than about personal ego.

This is especially true in collaborative work, where people work together to achieve the same goal. In these scenarios, **takers undermine group performance and stifle information sharing.** Powerful speech here tends to signal that the taker cares primarily about asserting dominance and ego, not about the good of the group.

Cited studies show that powerless speech engenders more respect and influence in collaborative work, and when a group is passive. In a study of pizza franchises, when employees are proactive, powerful
speech leads to 14% lower profits. (In contrast, when the work is independent and employees are passive, powerful speech is effective. We’ll discuss more below).

Over time, powerless speech can allow you to build a reputation as a helpful contributor, rather than a competitor vying for political power. If you’re seen as someone reliable and pleasant to work with, the peer feedback should ultimately benefit your career, if your superiors can pattern match and attribute group success to you.

Adam Grant gives the example of Volkswagen account manager Don Lane, who contributed the “Drive it. You’ll get it.” tagline to the creative team, despite not getting credit. He presented his idea as, “I know this is against the rules, but I want to give you a sense of what I’m talking about. What do you think of this line?”

Negotiating

In tense situations that may appear zero-sum to many people (like negotiations over wages or deals), advice seeking is a powerful tool for exercising influence when we lack authority. Advice seeking combines expressing vulnerability, asking questions, and talking tentatively. Naturally, takers tend to avoid advice seeking because it jeopardizes their appearance of control and harms their ego of knowing all the answers.

Advice seeking has four benefits:

- **Learning**: The advice giver is prompted to clarify details to give the best advice. This also puts the adviser in a brainstorming mood, where she’ll draw on more info than just voting yes/no on a pitch. The advisee benefits from this expanded knowledge.
- **Perspective taking**: To give good advice, advisers have to look at the situation from the advice seeker’s point of view. This creates empathy for the advice seeker rather than setting up an adversarial structure.
- **Commitment**: Because the adviser has put personal effort into the advice seeker’s situation, she feels commitment to follow through, especially if the top ideas are her own.
- **Flattery**: When you ask for someone for advice, you grant her prestige by showing you admire her knowledge and wisdom. It makes her feel important.

The adviser is also prone to liking the advice seeker more through resolving cognitive dissonance: “there’s no way I would help her if I didn’t like her, so this must mean I actually like her.”

Advice seeking works for all 3 reciprocity styles in the counterparty. Takers love having their ego massaged. Matchers like racking up credits they can use later. Givers feel helpful.

Adam Grant gives an anecdote of Annie, a scientist who was part of a downsized company branch in the Midwest. She could keep her job by transferring to the East Coast, but this would mean giving up her nighttime MBA program. She tried to argue for her position with a few managers but made no progress. Ultimately, she reached out to a HR manager and asked for advice: “if you were in my position, what
would you do?” The HR manager became her advocate. She took the woman's perspective, learned new details, and found through the department head that the company had a private jet that Annie could ride on. Now the HR manager was committed to delivering on this solution. If Annie had lobbied more assertively, she might never have learned about the jet.

Research examples:

- Experimental subjects were asked to negotiate the sale of commercial property. Sellers who focused on getting the highest price reached a deal only 8% of the time. Sellers who asked the buyers for advice reached a deal 42% of the time.
- In the work force across industries, seeking advice is one of the most effective ways to curry influence and be rated as an effective manager (in addition to rational persuasion and inspirational appeal).
  - This is an interesting study. All 3 of these work in all directions of the org chart (downwards, lateral, and upward).
  - Ingratiation, exchange, and personal appeal were used primarily in downward or lateral directions, and not upward. They were ineffective at changing effectiveness rating.
  - Finally, legitimating (do it because it’s what the rules say) or pressure correlate negatively with effectiveness.
- Executives seeking board seats are most effective when asking a current board director for advice, rather than complimenting.
- In an experiment environment, advice seekers were more likely to be recommended for promotion than non-seekers.

When Powerful Communication Works

When DOES powerful communication work? I wish Adam Grant explored this more in Give and Take, though it would detract from his message.

Takers are judged by group members as more competent and authoritative. Sometimes this works against them (when it discourages new ideas). But when listeners are passive “dutiful flowers,” powerful communication does work.

We see powerful communication work in Steve Jobs and TED talks, and I imagine it works in tense military situations. Does it work when the listener knows she’s in a subordinate and receptive position, so ego is not at play? When listening to Steve Jobs, an Apple fan already considers him a genius and is in a receptively subservient position in buying his products. "I want to be led as a dutiful follower."

[Powerful speech seems to confer more status when the task is independent rather than communal, and when the working environment rewards individual achievement rather than cooperation.]
Chapter 6: The Art of Motivation Maintenance

Why Some Givers Burn Out but Others Are On Fire

It’s a myth that self-interest and other-interest lie on the same spectrum, and that caring about yourself necessarily means not caring about others.

*Give and Take* argues that **self-interest and other-interest are completely independent motivations** – you can have both be very strong, or both be weak, forming this 2x2 matrix:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Low Other-Interest</th>
<th>High Other-Interest</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low Self-Interest</td>
<td>Apathetic</td>
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