

YOUR MONEY

AT THE OFFICE

Practice reciprocity without keeping score

By Harvey Mackay

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When we were growing up, most of us learned to live by the Golden Rule: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Not "as they do unto you," but "as you would have them do unto you."

As working professionals, there is another manifestation of this rule, the Golden Rule for Networking. It should permeate all your networking efforts. But it goes against every naturally acquisitive, ambitious and self-serving impulse in each of us.

My Golden Rule of Networking is this: Reciprocity without keeping score. Simply stated, it means what can I do for you without expecting anything in return?

Webster's dictionary says reciprocity is mutual action and mutual exchange. Mutually beneficial to both is the kind of reciprocity that most people are familiar with.

My definition of reciprocity is quite different. You must give without keeping score. No quid pro quo. It's the one fundamental concept that is the most misunderstood in business today. Few people truly understand this. You are either all

in or all out.

To be as candid as I can be, there have been plenty of people over the years who said they were going to help me in some way, but they didn't. Maybe they couldn't. Maybe they just forgot. Maybe they never intended to. It doesn't matter. You cannot keep score, or you will lose for sure.

Let me tell you how it works: If we're smart, we surround ourselves with talented people — the most talented we can find. They are our most powerful asset. That's why I think of this select group as our own personal brain bank. They include our family, friends, mentors, fellow workers and our industry contacts. You never know when you'll need to draw on the "accounts" you create with those oh-so-valuable resources.

With every contact within your brain bank — every call and every visit — preferably near the conclusion, sincerely ask the other person what you can do to be helpful to them. Ninety-five percent of the time, people will thank you for asking and tell you that there's really nothing they need. If, however, they do ask you for a favor, then your eyes should light up like the New Year's

ball in Times Square.

As you learn what is being asked for, note every detail with warmth and urgency. Fulfill the request to the best of your ability. As you do it, and after it's done, expect nothing, absolutely nothing, in return. Don't shop for gratitude in your phone calls or emails. Do the favor because you like and respect the other person and honestly want to help.

If you manage your career and live your life in this way, two magical things will happen:

1. Over time, people will find ways to do remarkable and unexpected things for you that make your life easier.

2. When you're hit by a storm in full fury, you are likely to find the most astonishing human network of support you could ever imagine.

There are countless ways business people can be helpful to each other:

» **Help a colleague prepare for a major presentation.** Act as their sounding board. Help your friend by pointing out what needs to be clearer ... what needs more emphasis ... and what seems to drag.

» **Be a source for heads-up information.** Do it for other business leaders in your community or your industry



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Offering assistance without asking for anything in return is a great way to network.

— perhaps not direct competitors, but almost everyone else.

» **Never abuse confidences and/or share inside information.** You only have to do this once, and you'll be marked as a security risk for life. Worst of all: You'll never learn what others know about you and why they won't trust you.

» **Don't export problems.** Sometimes companies try to downsize high-maintenance losers and stick them on another company's payroll. Believe me, if you do that, you will be remembered and for the wrong

reasons. When you terminate people who aren't performing, do them the favor of leveling with them and constructively help them readjust their career focus.

Over the years, my networking focus has shifted from the quantity of contacts I maintain to the quality of contacts. The quality of your life is determined by the quality of your relationships. The quality of your business is determined by the quality of your relationships.

Mackay's Moral: If you want to win at networking, don't keep score.