



The Most Important Lesson in Life

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Some people have it all. They're talented, motivated, and know exactly what they want out of life. These folks want success so badly they can taste it, and their behavior reflects that drive. And yet, even though they have so much promise and so much to offer, this fairy tale doesn't always have a happy ending.

I'm sure you know people who fit the bill. Every step they take is measured against how they'll benefit personally; everything they do has a *quid pro quo*; and every conversation they have is steered to their favorite topic — themselves.

You can rest assured that when they call, it's because they want something from you; they use people as pawns to get what they want; they feel no compunction about being the first to take, then leaving the scraps for everyone else; they bully others to get more for themselves. Sharing? Giving? Playing fair? Not even on their radar.

In the short term, their charisma, talent, and drive earn them BIG kudos. Long term, they're disastrous. Their confidence is perceived as arrogance; their go-getter personality comes across as pushy; and their ambition is viewed as uncontrollable. The result is that their ruthless behavior causes them to forfeit the things they want most in life

Fortunately, it doesn't have to be this way.

One of the most important lessons I've learned is that people who care about the needs of others and give of themselves go much further in life. "Are you kidding?" may be what you're thinking. "That's the most important lesson?"

Yes. Some people may believe that this philosophy is simplistic, naive, sappy, pie-in-the-sky, while others consider that it's only a nicety. You may be thinking, "While that

sounds great in theory, it doesn't work in the real world." The assumption people make is that you have to be ruthless to win. I'm here to tell you they're dead wrong. Here's why . . .

Common Fallacies

• **Promote yourself to make a great impression.** Self-promotion won't always lead to a favorable impression. In fact, the opposite may be true. If you want to make a great impression, spend your time listening and making others feel special rather than telling them how great you are.

• **You have to move fast to get what you want in life.** Relationships are built on **trust**, which takes time to develop. When people are viewed as "a bull in a china shop," their motives are likely to be misinterpreted.

• **If I don't take it first, someone else will.** When someone makes a concerted effort to be fair, others often return the favor. The opposite is also true — when someone thinks only of himself or herself, it breeds suspicion and contempt.

• **Packaging yourself is everything.** The best way to differentiate yourself or your organization is to be honest, caring, and hardworking. When you

work smart and provide significant value, you don't have to use gimmicks or play dirty to be recognized as a star.

• **Always try to get the upper hand.** Relationships are all about identifying areas of shared interest and creating opportunities for everyone to be a winner. When someone gains the upper hand at the expense of others, it creates envy and resentment.

• **Don't compromise if you don't have to.** Relationships are built on compromise. When you watch your partner's

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back, your partner will watch yours. Compromise is key. If two people are five steps apart, the best way to meet in the middle is for each person to take three steps forward.

- **In business, everyone's a competitor.** Some people believe that the best way to propel their career is to **outmaneuver** their colleagues. When you make people look good, you'll earn their trust and respect, and they'll be supportive of your efforts. Plus, they'll want you on their team.

- **There's not enough time to help others.** When you make an effort to help others, you'll create an army of people willing to return the favor for you one day. But remember, please don't keep score.

The Magic of Giving

You be the judge as to whether or not taking the high road leads to success . . .

Would you consider an egotist to be your role model? Would you choose a self-centered person as a good friend? Would you form a partnership with a greedy person? Would you recruit a selfish person for your team? Would you marry and spend your lifetime with a greedy person? I thought not.

It really doesn't take much effort to show others that you **care**. For example, treat them with dignity and respect; "make someone's day" with a few kind words; provide encouragement; show concern; spend quality time; listen with interest; share half; put their needs before your own; reach out to someone in need; share your wisdom and experience; pay them a compliment; teach them how to fish for a lifetime; thank someone for an effort well done; ask for or share an honest opinion; show gratitude; remember a special event; instill a strong set of values; provide encouragement.

Remember . . . give because you want to, not because you must. That way, it's from your heart. Believe me, it will come back to you in ways you'd never imagine — but don't give because you're expecting something in return.

Some people may look at you cross-eyed after you make a kind gesture. "C'mon," they'll think, "*why are you really doing this? No one does something for nothing.*" Then, when they realize there's no catch, something magical will happen. You'll be viewed in an entirely new light.

Just think how far your kindness will go toward building trust, strengthening your relationships, developing teamwork and camaraderie, enhancing your reputation and sense of self-worth — not to mention, adding to your karma.

Giving is a winning game. As Patti Thor says, "It's not that successful people are givers; it is that givers are successful people." So remember, it IS better to give than receive. Go ahead; give it a try.

Frank Sonnenberg, a marketing strategist, has written four books and published over 300 articles. *Managing with a Conscience (2nd edition)* is recognized as one of the top 10 Small Business Books of 2012 • Trust Across America named Sonnenberg one of the Top 100 Thought Leaders of 2011 and 2012 • In 2011, *Social Media Marketing Magazine* (SMM) selected Sonnenberg as one of the top marketing authors in the world on Twitter. • Salon.com named Sonnenberg's blog among the top 100 in 2009 • www.franksonnenbergonline.com © 2012 Frank Sonnenberg. All rights reserved. If you want to re-post or republish this post, please email frank@franksonnenbergonline.com. Thank you for respecting intellectual capital.