10
The Law of Giving

"It is one of the most beautiful compensations of life, that no man can sincerely try to help another without helping himself."
—Ralph Waldo Emerson, nineteenth-century writer and philosopher

Just as I was getting ready to make the leap from the finance industry to starting my own business, I attended the Columbia Women in Business (CWIB) conference and sat in on a panel about entrepreneurship. As someone daunted by the thought of going out on my own, I found myself particularly interested in one panelist named Amy. She had already successfully launched a business very similar in structure and services to the one I was planning. On top of that, Amy was articulate and eloquent when speaking about the experience on the panel. I was immediately in awe of her and wanted to speak to her.

Rather than compete with everyone swarming the stage at the end of the session, I instead sought her out at lunch and effusively told her how impressed I was by her career path and her work. She smiled, genuinely honored by the compliment. We chatted for the rest of the lunch about some of the challenges she had faced when establishing her business.

By the end of lunch I was even more in awe of her and everything she’d done, and I decided to take a chance and
ask her if she’d be willing to meet me for coffee one day soon to continue the conversation. She suggested that we meet for lunch instead. A week later we sat in a restaurant for three hours while she poured out wisdom and advice. I’ve never forgotten her answer to my question about how she got started. She said, “I just hung out my shingle and said, ‘Open for business.’” Those words gave me the courage to do just that.

I so appreciated the time and insights she so generously gave me, with no thought of how the favor might be returned. After that lunch we touched base a couple of times a year, and even though I never did find a way to reciprocate her kindnesses, I always held her in my mind as my example of how to give to others. I don’t think she ever even knew the impact she had on my career with just that one conversation.

My grandmother had the ability to induce guilt with one phrase, muttered in her heavy Yiddish accent: “Oy, what I do for you,” she’d say with a roll of her eyes, implying that she always did more for us than we could ever do for her. This chapter is about adopting exactly the opposite attitude and instead thinking, *What can I do for you?*

One of the strongest ways to increase likability and foster a connection is to demonstrate that we understand someone else’s needs and are happy to help fulfill them. By drawing on what we have learned about the other laws of likability, we can apply our creativity to expand the kinds of value we have to offer others, giving to them in ways that speak directly to what might be useful for them.

**I’ll Scratch Your Back . . .**

“. . . If you scratch mine” is usually the way that phrase ends. The reality, however, is that there is extraordinary value in doing things
for others simply because you want to, not because you expect anything in return. That’s the law of giving: Do because you can, give first. Giving creates value. It doesn’t always mean exerting major effort or making grand gestures. Even by extending yourself in small ways you are sending the signal that you think the other person is worth the effort, and that you want to help.

Sometimes it is easy to see how you may help another person. Other times it’s not as obvious, especially with regard to someone who may be more senior than you. But everyone needs and appreciates assistance. Don’t underestimate your ability to bring value to someone else.

Several years ago, through a mutual friend, I was introduced to James, a top executive at a company whose customers were high school students. I had an idea for a series of skills workshops for teenagers, and James and I had lunch to discuss whether the workshops would be a good fit with his company’s offerings. We agreed fairly quickly that my workshops weren’t the right complement for his company, but our conversation was stimulating nonetheless, and we continued discussing business challenges in specific and general ways.

Both financially and professionally, James was significantly more successful than I was, but by listening attentively to what he told me about his work, and exerting some extra effort to follow up, I was able to offer him assistance. I demonstrated the e-blackboard site at the university where I was teaching and sent him book recommendations I thought might be useful. I wanted to show him that I comprehended what he’d told me, had the ability to suggest solutions and resources, and thought his endeavors were worth supporting. Nothing I did was any big deal, but it demonstrated that I valued our discussion and his work.

One of my coaching colleagues, Tanya, has a great story about her transition from the corporate world to establishing her own business as a coach and trainer. She was traveling frequently for business, and as part of that work she often had to hire independent trainers to conduct off-site sessions. After working with and
closely observing these contractors numerous times (and paying them top dollar for their services), she realized that she could conduct these sessions just as effectively. And she wanted to give it a shot.

She talked to her boss, and he went out of his way to support her, sending her to educational seminars to develop her skill sets and giving her opportunities to conduct internal training seminars. Her boss still expected Tanya to carry her regular workload too, but he wanted to keep her motivated and happy, and so he determined that if she wanted to acquire these new skills while she was a part of his team, he was going to make sure she did it well. He created a supportive office environment, which let Tanya know he really was behind her.

Tanya eventually did so well with the internal training sessions she conducted, and enjoyed the work so much, that she left the company to establish her own business. Her former boss became one of her biggest clients.

Doing things for others and being generous with your support and your time are likable qualities. They also foster the law of familiarity, keeping you in people’s minds and giving them reasons to want to stay in touch with you and continue growing the relationship.

In Chapter 8, I said that there are two things you want to do before you end a conversation: Make the person you are talking to feel good (mood memory), and create the opportunity for follow-up. Extending a helping hand is one of the best ways to follow up, and it also opens the door for continued contact going forward. With every interaction you increase familiarity and similarity. The law of giving is a powerful enhancement of every other law of likability.

Do Unto Others

There are so many ways to provide value to another person, and everyone has something to offer. Whether it’s by suggesting re-
sources, creating opportunities for meaningful interactions, or offering feedback and support, we can employ the law of giving by seeking out chances to give back. People tend to respond to situations in the same tried-and-true ways, which works on a certain level: If something has been effective in the past, chances are it will prove so again in the future. But sticking only to these well-tested methods can narrow our view of what we can do for others. Perhaps we feel as if we don’t have time to make the extra effort, or we wonder when doing so would be appropriate. By broadening our perspectives and expanding our creative approaches to situations, we can understand that giving is a never-ending process and benefits us throughout the lengths of our careers. By embracing opportunities to help others, we can recognize all the ways, big and small, that giving adds value to our relationships.

Connections

I have always been a matchmaker. As soon as I meet someone, I start thinking about other people I know whom they would want to meet. When I put people together I’m putting all the other laws into action: First, I get curious; then, I focus on listening; and then my synapses start to fire when I recognize similarities. As I’m talking with someone, ideas about whom I might connect that person with jump into my mind. I’ll be thinking, “I know someone who used to work at that company,” or “I have a friend who attended that coaching program,” or “I know someone in your field who also just moved to the area.” The points of connection continue unfolding.

Before I introduce people I always ask them if they want to be introduced, since I only want to make the introduction if both people are interested (I’ll elaborate on this subject in the section Favors and Advice, later in this chapter). I’m also mindful that introductions are an extension of the person who makes them, and carry the weight of that person’s reputation. When I’ve been
introduced to someone because a colleague thinks there’d be an opportunity for connection between me and the other person, I always update the introducer about the progress of the relationship once the introduction has been made. By connecting two people for whatever good reasons, you are applying the laws of familiarity and giving, and creating opportunities for meaningful interactions to take place.

Invitations

Who doesn’t like to get invited to a party? Extending an invitation to an event is one of the easiest things you can do for someone. Think about what you have in common—interests, background, people—and then look for opportunities to include that person in events or activities that speak to that commonality.

Inform Others About an Event

Every year, I attend CWIB, the conference I mentioned in the opening story of this chapter. It is one of the best ways I can spend a day. The speakers are engaging; the topics are timely; and the day, quite simply, is fun. But more than anything else, I find the conference inspiring. It is impossible not to be inspired when you are in a roomful of other professionals (hundreds of them) who want to help one another. The attendees are mostly women, but each year there are surprisingly more and more men who have discovered the value of the event, and their enthusiastic attendance further increases the opportunities for forming meaningful connections. Of course I want to share the event with others (including, while I’m at it, the readers of this book—go to www.cwib.org for more information). As soon as the date is announced each year, I send an e-mail to everyone I think would be interested. So far, someone has always joined me, and I am thrilled to be able to introduce people to the value of the conference.
A conference is just one example of an event to which you can extend an invitation. If you belong to a club, group, or organization that allows nonmembers to attend, that is the perfect chance to think about inviting someone to the next gathering. My former colleague Frederick is an adventure junkie who belongs to a club of extreme-sports enthusiasts who arrange trips to do white-water rafting, bungee jumping, and spelunking. When a new hire named Tony joined our team and Frederick discovered that he had similar interests, he immediately forwarded the club link to Tony. It was a simple gesture, but it presented Tony with new opportunities for doing things he loved, made him feel welcomed to our team, and showed that Frederick was friendly and inclusive, which quickly established a basis for strong collegial communication and trust between them.

There are any number of events that can provide opportunities for further contact and continued connection. I always appreciate hearing about webinars or lectures that pertain to my work. I often invite other people to participate in a volunteer activity I’m doing if I think it would interest them. And right after I’d moved to a new town, I was pretty excited to get invited to a women’s night out. It was a fun and completely casual event that offered the chance to form all kinds of new connections.

The events you inform people of don’t even have to be ones you are attending; they can simply be things that crossed your path and that you thought the person might be interested in. Don’t flood people’s inboxes, of course, and don’t invite everyone you know to everything you hear about. Make it personal. This shows people that you’re thinking specifically of them.

Create a Group

When I attended CWIB for the first time in the early 2000s, I was still transitioning from my finance life into my current career. I was incredibly motivated by meeting so many women who were
either already established in my new field, in the early stages of transitioning into it (like I was), or somewhere in between. I even suggested we start an informal peer-mentoring group to help each other out. And so I e-mailed four of the women I met about the idea, set a date, and then almost called it off when only two of them could make it.

Looking back, I am so glad I didn’t call it off. There were just three of us at the first meeting, sitting in the café at a bookstore with no agenda. We simply shared what we were working on. A month or two later, I tried again to get our original group of five together. This time everyone could make it, and we all felt energized by the gathering. We began meeting regularly. As I started connecting with more and more people in my new field, I expanded the invite list to our get-togethers. Finally we moved from the bookstore to my apartment for our first “official” meeting. More than a dozen women attended. I had formed a group.

Over time the group got so large that the location changed again. We established a Yahoo group so that we could share our resources, events, books, and contact information collectively online. We now use LinkedIn for this purpose, and there are more than fifty women who participate. Each member was personally invited to join our network by someone who already belonged, and our informal association has become a tremendous way to support and help one another.

Groups can be formed around any shared interest, professional or personal. Book clubs, investment clubs, and poker nights are all great excuses for connecting with people who have shared interests and inviting others to join you in forming the connections.

Create an Event

One of my colleagues, Larry, organizes a monthly lunch to which he invites a rotating group of core business associates. Everyone pays for themselves, and Larry arranges a set menu with the res-
taurant so that costs are reasonable and anticipated. The lunches are always an excellent chance to connect with new people in your field, catch up with acquaintances, and think creatively about possible collaborations or resource sharing.

The industry lunch is just one example of ways to include people in a shared event. Think about what would interest people in your network, and plan a way to connect them through an activity. Organize a cooking lesson by a local chef; invite a financial planner you know to hold a seminar. The event doesn’t have to cost you anything beyond a little time and effort, and the rewards will be countless.

My neighbor Bonnie, a former PTA president and mom of a high school junior, approached the superintendent of our local school system about creating a college prep curriculum. Budget cuts meant that new programs couldn’t be funded, so Bonnie responded by creating a workshop at her home for students to prepare for college interviews. She contacted parents to arrange for a group of students to gather at her house, and invited me over to lead the workshop. The event sparked many productive discussions afterward, and the students acquired valuable skills, and in the end, it generated such interest that the parents sought to expand the program.

Information and Articles

Marge was the head of training at a high-profile museum. We were introduced through a mutual friend, and commonalities between us were not immediately obvious: She was much older than I was, had spent her career in a field that I didn’t know much about, and had something of a reticent demeanor, tending not to share too much personal information in conversations and keeping everything strictly professional.

Right before I was about to conduct a team-building seminar at the museum, I received news that my son had a serious medical
condition. I suppose that Marge picked up on something in my voice or my body language, because she asked me if I was all right. I was so overwhelmed by the news that I didn’t even realize the extent to which I was explaining my distress; I just poured it all out. I was so grateful that someone was there, offering to listen.

I had no idea that my personal disclosure would lead to her making one of her own. It turned out that Marge’s son had a serious medical condition as well, so grave that at age 15 he was completely dependent on others for everything and lived with full-time care. Wow. Her story stopped me in my tracks. She said that she wasn’t telling me this to make me feel better or worse, but just to let me know that she understood. She had been dealing with her son’s extremely difficult medical issues for years.

Her openness steadied me, and I was able to refocus on the seminar and solidly deliver, but even more important was what came afterward. Marge began sending me articles and information to help me navigate the challenges my family and I were now dealing with. As I learned more about her situation, I began thinking of ways I could be of help to her. We shared strategies, relevant news stories, and medical updates. There was true reciprocity between us, born out of care and understanding. At some point we both realized that we had become trusted, valued friends, and though we continue to work together it is not just about the work anymore, it’s about the relationship, the friendship. And as I always say, I want to work with people I’m friends with. And that’s where I am with Marge.

Somewhere during a conversation, you are likely going to hear about something that truly interests the other person. When following up with people afterward, you have the perfect opportunity for forwarding links or information they might find engaging. Even if no ideas come to you during the conversation, make a note on the back of their business card or next to their name in your BlackBerry about what their interests are. This allows you to tuck away the information until you do hear about something that
would be of interest to them or, if you want to be more proactive, to put a little effort into finding something that may be helpful, which may be as simple as an online article or the names of some books. Take five minutes to query your network for opinions or resources that the person might find useful.

A word of caution, which is largely common sense but bears mentioning: Understand your audience. What one person finds valuable may be another person’s spam. Only forward information and links that speak to the person’s genuine interests.

Favors and Advice

For many people, favors are difficult to request but easy to grant. The same can be true of advice: We consult people we admire, but underplay the wisdom and insights we have to pass on to someone else. We all have knowledge, skills, experience, and unique perspectives to contribute. Sharing these things extends the circles of context for connecting among our networks and gives us opportunities to deepen our relationships with others. Even if you are just starting out in your career, you have valuable perspectives and advice to share. Older colleagues are often curious about the outlook of younger generations, and they could be eager to hear your views.

Here are examples of some of the favors I’ve recently done for others. At the bottom of the list, fill in at least three things you did or can do for other people. Think about your life and your associations, and add three more ideas for giving advice or doing a favor.

- Sent a PR lead to a colleague
- Answered questions related to my area of expertise
- Gave advice to colleagues about pricing their services
- Referred a potential client to a friend
- Talked to interested colleagues about the finance profession, training profession, and entrepreneurship
- Talked to my friends’ children about the universities I attended and at which I teach
- Gave away the clothes, toys, and books that my kids have outgrown
- Invited someone to join me at an invitation-only event
- Favors and advice are things you should offer freely, but conscientiously. A favor is only a favor when someone wants it. And stay aware of when the circle of favors is such that your favor for someone else involves a favor to you. This happens frequently when introducing people to one another. Whenever I meet someone curious about transitioning into hedge funds, I reach out to my friend Darrell, who has been in that field for his whole career. Darrell is always happy to speak with anyone I put him in touch with, but he does it as a favor to me more than anything else.
- Make the effort to connect people with the information and resources you have at your disposal, but stay mindful of how you do it. Don’t wear out your welcome by introducing too many people to the same desirable contact. The point is to truly add value, not take advantage of someone else’s goodwill.
- Likewise, if advice is given without sensitivity, it can come off as someone being nosy or trying to tell you what to do. When my friend Sally was hired by the employer of another one of our friends, Fran, the two of them ran into trouble in the office even though they’d been friends for a while. During Sally’s first week on the job, Fran was full of advice for her about how to acclimate, pointing out which colleagues were irritating, which ones were good team players, and so on. Fran was only trying to help, but Sally felt as if she’d immediately been restricted in terms of how
she could behave in the office and whom she could interact with. If she formed a connection with someone Fran didn’t particularly care for, she felt as if she was being disloyal to Fran. Things between them got tense. It took some time for them to grow comfortable working together and get their friendship back on track.

The lesson here: When in doubt, *ask permission.* Simply inquire whether the other person wants to hear your advice by saying something such as, “Are you interested in an opinion, or is now not the right time?” or “Do you want my advice, or do you just need to get this off your chest?”

---

**LIVE THE LAW: WHAT CAN I DO FOR YOU?**

Create an action plan for following the law of giving. Based on the previous sections, mark down specifically what you will do, who you will do it for, and when you will get it done. Write down at least one thing you will do in each category, and choose a different person for each planned action. Then do it.

**ACTION PLAN**

**CONNECTION**

WHO __________________________ TO WHOM __________________________

WHY __________________________ WHEN __________________________

**INVITATION**

TO WHAT __________________________

WHO __________________________ WHEN __________________________
What Goes Around, Comes Around

When you give freely to others, not only do you increase your likability and aid other people, you almost always get something unintended in return. I am an avid traveler and my conversations with people often come around to the subject of favorite vacation spots and destinations. If someone is headed to a place I’ve explored, I always offer to share my experiences. When I follow up with people after one of these conversations, I’ll frequently reference a resort they mentioned or forward links to places I think they might like to visit. Sometimes I even send along a few reviews I’ve uncovered. This stokes my own thirst for exploring new places.

During one of my conversations with James, the top executive, he once mentioned to me some technical issues he was facing with a project under development. I am definitely not a techie, but my husband definitely is. I called up Mike, explained what James was trying to accomplish, and learned about the options. Then it was my pleasure to share those insights with James. Not only was I able to save him some effort and pass along useful knowledge, I also got educated during the process. It was a win-win experience.

And then there are the times when, because of ways you’ve
willingly given in the past, you find yourself unexpectedly on the receiving end. More than a year after I met James, we once again had an opportunity to talk. This time I was explaining to him a business idea of mine. More than anything else, it was a chance for me to hear myself flesh out the idea to an astute businessman. James replied that when I was ready to pursue the idea, he would happily help. I didn’t expect this gracious offer, and was deeply touched by it, but that is part of what is behind the law of giving: When you simply do something for other people out of a genuine desire to help them, more often than not they are going to want to reciprocate. Giving inspires giving. The result is mutual growth and a stronger relationship.

Be honest with yourself about your intentions. If you do have expectations that you will be repaid for your efforts, that’s not the same as giving freely, so don’t try to disguise it as such. Your motivations will be detected at some level by the other person. To truly harness the law of giving—and its rewards—you have to genuinely feel that you don’t expect anything in return.

**Pay It Forward**

This chapter opened with a story about Amy, who is an example to me of what it means to give to someone else, without expectations. I remember that when I got together with Amy, I paid for lunch. It seemed like the least I could do since she had shared her insights and experiences with me so generously, and I had gathered hoards of knowledge from the conversation. I remember feeling as if I could never repay her for all the wisdom she so graciously bestowed, and to be honest, I still feel that way.

What I have done to try to repay her kindness and generosity in some way is to emulate her giving. At every possible chance, I pay it forward. When someone asks me for a favor, some advice, or some of my time, I almost unequivocally answer, “Yes.” I give
willingly and in as much abundance as I can. Amy put me on this path of generosity and taught me that “what you give is what you get.” Even when it seems as if we are not getting anything in return for our efforts, patience can help us understand how the things we do positively impact ours and other people’s lives in many different ways. That law of patience is what we will explore in Chapter 11.
Refresh Your Memory

The Law of Giving: Give First. Do because you can, and because giving creates value.

Do Unto Others. There are countless ways to give freely to others, including making introductions to other people they might benefit from knowing, extending invitations to events and activities, sharing resources, doing favors, and giving advice.

You Can Help. Be proactive about determining how you can help the people in your circle. Set the law of giving in motion by creating an action plan detailing what you are going to do, who you will do it for, and when you will do it. Then do it.

What Goes Around, Comes Around. You may not always be the explicit recipient of the law of giving, but when you give to others, more often than not you reap rewards in return.

Pay It Forward. Repay kindnesses and generosity bestowed upon you by continuing the giving. Extend yourself freely to others to sustain the positive cycle of giving.