

doesn't exactly ooze warmth. "I'm a big guy with a military look," Dave explains,

and I have an intense streak. In the trade secrets trial, I wouldn't say stuttering is why I won, but it helped my credibility: it made me a real person. It gave them an insight into my character that they liked. It humanized me: this is a guy we can pull for. It made me seem less polished, and more credible as an advocate. People think you have to be this polished, perfect person. Actually, you don't want a lawyer who is too slick. Good trial lawyers aim to be an expert and a regular guy at the same time.

When Dave Walton stands in front of a jury in spite of his stutter, they can see that he cares deeply about his clients—he believes in them enough that he's willing to expose his own vulnerability to support them. This sends a powerful message to his audience that helps win them over by increasing his prestige and softening the dominance in his natural appearance.

Selling: Separating the Swindlers from the Samaritans

Expressing vulnerability in ways that are unrelated to competence may build prestige, but it's only a starting point for givers to exercise influence. To effectively influence people, we need to convert the respect that we earn into a reason for our audiences to change their attitudes and behaviors. Nowhere is this clearer than in sales, where the entire job depends on getting people to buy—and buy more. We often stereotype salespeople as manipulative and Machiavellian, thinking of great sellers as intimidating, confrontational, self-serving, or even sometimes deceitful. Daniel Pink finds that the first words that come to mind when we think of salespeople are *pushy*, *ugh*, and *yuck*. In one study, people ranked the forty-four most commonly chosen MBA occupations in terms of how socially responsible they were. Salesperson ranked forty-third, barely above stockbroker at the very [bottom of the social responsibility list](#). This sets up the expectation that top salespeople must be takers, yet in the opening chapter, we saw a preview of evidence that many highly productive salespeople are givers. How do givers sell effectively?

[Bill Grumbles](#) is a powerful executive, but if you met him, you probably wouldn't realize it. He speaks so softly that you might find yourself leaning forward just to hear him. After working his way up to a vice presidency at HBO, he became the president of worldwide distribution for TBS. Throughout his career, Grumbles has gone out of his way to help and mentor others. Today, he spends his time coaching business students on leadership and volunteering to give them career advice. Early on, powerless communication actually helped him rise to the top of HBO's sales charts.

Back in 1977, HBO was an unknown brand; most Americans didn't even have cable. Grumbles was in his late twenties, and he was sent to open an HBO sales office in Kansas City. He had no sales experience, so he started doing what he did best as a giver: asking questions. His questions were sincere, and customers responded. "I would be on a sales call, and I'd look at the walls, around the office, and see their interests. I'd ask about their grandchildren, or their favorite sports team. I would ask a question, and customers would talk for twenty minutes." Other salespeople were bringing in one contract a month. Grumbles was four times as productive: he brought in one contract a week.

By asking questions and listening to the answers, Grumbles showed his customers that he cared about their interests. This built prestige: customers respected and admired the concern that he showed. After one of his early sales calls, a customer took him aside to tell him he was a "great conversationalist." Grumbles laughs: "I'd hardly said a thing!"

Asking questions opened the door for customers to experience what the psychologist James Pennebaker calls the [joy of talking](#). Years ago, Pennebaker divided strangers into small groups. Imagine that you've just joined one of his groups, and you have fifteen minutes to talk with strangers about a topic of your choice. You might chat about your hometown, where you went to college, or your career.

After the fifteen minutes are up, you rate how much you like the group. It turns out that the more you talked, the more you like the group. This isn't surprising, since people love to talk about themselves. But let me ask you another question: How much did you learn about the group?

Logically, learning about the people around you should depend on listening. The less you talk, the more you should discover about the group. But Pennebaker found the opposite: the *more* you talk, the *more you think you've learned about the group*. By talking like a taker and dominating the

conversation, you believe you've actually come to know the people around you, even though they barely spoke. In *Opening Up*, Pennebaker muses, "Most of us find that communicating our thoughts is a supremely enjoyable learning experience."

It's the givers, by virtue of their interest in getting to know us, who ask us the questions that enable us to experience the joy of learning from ourselves. And by giving us the floor, givers are actually learning about us and from us, which helps them figure out how to sell us things we already value.

To shed further light on how givers sell successfully, I want to take you on a journey to Raleigh, North Carolina, where I'm posing as a mystery shopper. I'm working with an innovative optometry company called Eye Care Associates, with the goal of figuring out what distinguishes star sellers from the rest of the pack. Every employee in the company has filled out a survey about whether they're givers, takers, or matchers, and now it's time for me to see them in action.

I enter an eye care office and express an interest in replacing a pair of broken sunglass frames that I purchased at LensCrafters. I walk over to a display case, and I'm approached by my very first salesman. He shows me a snazzy pair of glasses, and swiftly launches into a compelling pitch with powerful communication. The lenses are tailor-made for driving. The contours of the frames accentuate the shape of my face. The color matches my skin tone. I've never been mistaken for cool, but I briefly flirt with the fantasy that these shades could transform me into James Bond—or at least James Woods. When I express concerns about the price, the salesman confidently assures me that they're worth it. They fit me so perfectly, he says, that the designers must have had a winning face like mine in mind when they created these shades. I develop a sneaking suspicion that he's flattering me to make the sale. *Taker?*

At another office, the salesperson offers to do me a favor. He'll replace my frames for free, if I switch over to his office for eye exams. *Matcher . . . and I have the survey data to back it up.*

Who's the more successful seller: the taker or the matcher?

Neither. Both are right in the middle of the pack.

At a third office in Knightdale, North Carolina, I meet Kildare Escoto. Kildare is an imposing figure, with thick eyebrows and a thin goatee. He's a serious weightlifter, and if you asked him right now, he could drop and do a hundred push-ups without breaking a sweat. His parents are from the Dominican Republic, and he grew up in rough-and-tumble New York City. He has the same title as the two salespeople I met at other offices, but his style couldn't be more different.

We're the exact same age, but Kildare calls me "sir," and I sense that he means it. He speaks softly and asks me some basic questions before he even pulls out a single tray of sunglasses from the case. Have I ever been here before? Do I have a prescription to fill? What's my lifestyle like—do I play sports? He listens carefully to my answers and gives me some space to contemplate.

I have 20/20 vision, but Kildare is so good that I suddenly feel the urge to buy a pair of shades. I blow my cover. I tell him I'm studying the techniques of outstanding salespeople—is he willing to discuss his approach? Kildare objects. "I don't look at it as selling," he explains. "I see myself as an optician. We're in the medical field first, retail second, sales maybe third. My job is to take the patient, ask the patient questions, and see what the patient needs. My mind-set is not to sell. My job is to help. My main purpose is to educate and inform patients on what's important. My true concern in the long run is that the patient can see."

The data reveal two striking facts about Kildare Escoto. First, in my survey, he had the single highest giver score of any employee in the company. Second, he was also the [top-selling optician](#) in

the entire company, bringing in more than double the average sales revenue.

It's not a coincidence. The second-highest seller also more than doubled the average, and she's a giver too. Her name is Nancy Phelps, and she has the same philosophy as Kildare. "I get involved with patients, ask where they work, what their hobbies are, what they like to do on vacations. It's about the patients and their needs." It's revealing that when patients walk in the door, they ask for Nancy. "I'm a real believer in giving patients their new fresh eyes that they're going to see their best in," she says.

To see whether Kildare and Nancy are exceptions to the rule, Dane Barnes and I asked [hundreds of opticians](#) to complete a survey measuring whether they were takers, matchers, or givers. We also gave them an intelligence test, assessing their ability to solve complex problems. Then we tracked their sales revenue over the course of an entire year.

Even after controlling for intelligence, the givers outsold the matchers and takers. The average giver brought in over 30 percent more annual revenue than matchers and 68 percent more than takers. Even though matchers and takers together represented over 70 percent of the sellers, half of the top sellers were givers. If all opticians were givers, the average company's annual revenue would spike from approximately \$11.5 million to more than \$15.1 million. Givers are the top sellers, and a key reason is powerless communication.

Asking questions is a form of powerless communication that givers adopt naturally. Questions work especially well when the audience is already skeptical of your influence, such as when you lack credibility or status, or when you're in a highly competitive negotiation situation. Neil Rackham spent nine years studying expert and average negotiators. He identified [expert negotiators](#) as those who were rated as highly effective by both sides, and had a strong track record of success with few failures. He recorded more than one hundred negotiations and combed through them to see how the experts differed from average negotiators. The expert negotiators spent much more time trying to understand the other side's perspective: questions made up over 21 percent of the experts' comments but less than 10 percent of the average negotiators' comments.

If Kildare were a taker, he'd be more interested in leading with his own answers than asking questions. But instead of telling patients what they want, he asks them what they want. One day, Mrs. Jones comes out of an eye exam, and Kildare approaches her to find out if she's interested in a new pair of glasses. In one eye, she's nearsighted. In the other eye, she's farsighted. Her doctor has prescribed a multifocal lens, but she's clearly skeptical. She's there to get her eyes examined, and has no intention of making an expensive purchase. She tells Kildare she doesn't want to try the new lens.

Instead of delivering an assertive pitch, Kildare starts asking her questions. "What kind of work do you do?" He learns that she works at a computer, and he notices that when she's trying to read, she turns her head to privilege her nearsighted eye. When she's looking at something in the distance, as when driving, she turns her head the other way to rely on her farsighted eye. Kildare asks why the doctor has prescribed a new lens, and she mentions that she's struggling with distance, computer work, and reading. He sees that she's getting frustrated and reassures her: "If you feel you don't need corrective lenses, I'm not going to waste your time. Let me just ask you one more question: when will you wear these glasses?" She says they would really only be useful at work, and they're awfully expensive if she can only wear them part of the day.

As he listens to her answer, Kildare realizes that his customer has a misconception about how multifocal lenses can be used. He gently explains that she can use multifocal lenses not only at work,

but also in the car and at home. She's intrigued, and she tries them on. A few minutes later, she decides to get fitted for her very first pair of multifocal glasses, spending \$725. A taker might have lost the sale. By asking questions, Kildare was able to understand her concerns and address them.

But maybe we're stacking the deck in favor of givers. After all, opticians are selling in the health care industry, where it's easy to believe in the product and care about patients in need. Can givers succeed in sales jobs where customers are more skeptical, like insurance? In one study, managers rated the giving behaviors of more than a thousand [insurance salespeople](#). Even in insurance, the higher the salesperson's giver score, the greater that salesperson's revenue, policies sold, applications, sales quotas met, and commissions earned.

By asking questions and getting to know their customers, givers build trust and gain knowledge about their customers' needs. Over time, this makes them better and better at selling. In one study, [pharmaceutical salespeople](#) were assigned to a new product with no existing client base. Each quarter, even though the salespeople were paid commission, the givers pulled further ahead of the others.* Moreover, giving was the only characteristic to predict performance: it didn't matter whether the salespeople were conscientious or carefree, extroverted or introverted, emotionally stable or anxious, and open-minded or traditional. The defining quality of a top pharmaceutical salesperson was being a giver. And powerless communication, marked by questions, is the defining quality of how givers sell.

Out of curiosity, are you [planning to vote](#) in the next presidential election?

By asking you that one question, I've just increased the odds that you will actually vote by 41 percent.

That's another benefit of powerless communication. Many people assume that the key to persuasive skill is to deliver a confident, assertive pitch. But in daily life, we're bombarded by advertisers, telemarketers, salespeople, fund-raisers, and politicians trying to convince us that we want to buy their products, use their services, and support their causes. When we hear a powerful persuasive message, [we get suspicious](#). In some cases, we're concerned about being tricked, duped, or manipulated by a taker. In other situations, we just want to make our own free choices, rather than having our decisions controlled by someone else. So if I tell you to go out and vote, you might resist. But when I ask if you're planning to vote, you don't feel like I'm trying to influence you. It's an innocent query, and instead of resisting my influence, you reflect on it. "Well, I do care about being a good citizen, and I want to support my candidate." This doesn't feel like I'm persuading you. As Aronson explains, you've been convinced by someone you already like and trust:

Yourself.

Dave Walton knows why questions are effective persuasive devices. He sees great lawyers as salespeople, and it's important that they don't sell their arguments too assertively, like takers. "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." Thoughtful questions pave the way for jurors to persuade themselves. According to Aronson, "in direct persuasion, the audience is constantly aware of the fact that they have been persuaded by another. Where [self-persuasion](#) occurs, people are convinced that the motivation for change has come from within."

By asking people questions about their plans and intentions, we increase the likelihood that they actually act on these plans and intentions. Research shows that if I ask you whether you're planning to

buy a new computer in the next six months, you'll be 18 percent more likely to go out and get one. But it only works if you already feel good about the intention that the question targets. Studies show that asking questions about your plans to floss your teeth and avoid fatty foods significantly enhances the odds that you will actually floss and eat healthy. These are desirable actions, so questions open the door for you to persuade yourself to engage in them.* But if I ask about your plans to do something undesirable, questions don't work. For example, are you planning to eat some chocolate-covered grasshoppers this month?

After thinking about it, you're probably even less likely to do it. In the examples that we've covered so far, the givers were selling desirable products to interested customers. When Bill Grumbles was selling HBO, he had customers who were open to a better cable product. When Kildare Escoto and Nancy Phelps sell glasses, they have patients who need new frames or lenses. How do givers change the minds of audiences who aren't so receptive?

Persuading: The Technique of Tentative Talk

In 2004, Volkswagen's retail theme was "Drive it. You'll get it." Consumers connected with the double meaning. The line conveyed that to fully appreciate a Volkswagen's performance features, you had to sit behind the wheel. It also carried another message: if you take the car for a test drive, you'll love it so much that you'll end up buying it. It was just one of a string of memorable campaigns from Arnold Worldwide, Volkswagen's advertising agency. But [Don Lane](#), the man who generated the clever "Drive it. You'll get it" theme, never appeared in the credits.

Lane was a senior account executive, not a member of the creative department. His job was to package and sell the creative team's ideas. One day, while stuck on a strategic brief for the creative team, an idea popped into his head. Instead of writing the strategy, he wrote a sample script that ended with the line, "Drive it. You'll get it."

It wasn't standard practice for an account person to come to the creative team with a solution, instead of a problem to solve. In fact, it was forbidden for an account guy to contribute to the creative process. So Lane had a dilemma: how could he get the creative team to listen? If he were a taker, he might have stormed into the creative director's office to pitch the line, lobby powerfully for it, and demand full credit. If he were a matcher, he might have offered a favor to the creative team and hoped for reciprocity, or called in a favor owed. But Lane leaned in the giver direction. He wasn't concerned about the credit; he just wanted to help the creative team and see a good line get implemented. "In our business, creative people are gifted and deserve to get most of, if not all of, the credit. Some account management people resent that," Lane says. "I knew that my job was to help creative people and provide space for them to come up with ideas. I didn't really care if anyone knew it was my idea. It didn't matter where the idea came from. If it worked, we would all share in the success."

Lane walked into the creative director's office. Instead of using powerful communication—"I have a great line, you should use it"—he went with a softer approach. He presented a sample radio script to show how it would work. Then he said to the creative director, "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? 'Drive it, you'll get it.'"

The creative director got it. He looked up at Lane, smiled, and said, "That's our campaign." The campaign sold many cars and won several advertising awards.

Alison Fragale, a professor at the University of North Carolina, is an expert on the form of powerless communication that Don Lane used effectively. Fragale finds that speech styles send signals about who's a giver and who's a taker. Takers tend to use powerful speech: they're assertive and direct. Givers tend to use more powerless speech, talking with tentative markers like these:

- Hesitations: "well," "um," "uh," "you know"
- Hedges: "kinda," "sorta," "maybe," "probably," "I think"
- Disclaimers: "this may be a bad idea, but"
- Tag questions: "that's interesting, isn't it?" or "that's a good idea, right?"
- Intensifiers: "really," "very," "quite"

These markers send a clear message to the audience: the speaker lacks confidence and authority. Lacking confidence is a bad thing, right?

If we break down how Don Lane pitched his idea, we can see two markers of powerless speech: a disclaimer and a tag question. His disclaimer was “I know this is against the rules, but,” and his tag question was “What do you think?” Fragale shows that when people have to work closely together, such as in teams and service relationships, powerless speech is actually more influential than powerful speech.

To illustrate one of her studies, imagine that your plane has just crash-landed in the desert. You’re with your coworker, Jamie. You have to prioritize twelve items, including a flashlight and a map, in order of importance for survival. You share your rankings with Jamie, who disagrees. You’re not a fan of the flashlight. But Jamie thinks it’s critical, and decides to deliver a forceful message:

The flashlight needs to be rated higher. It is the only reliable night signaling device; also, the reflector and lens could be used to start a fire, which is another way to signal for help. Put it higher.

Jamie sounds like a taker—and probably is, since takers are inclined to give orders like this. Are you willing to listen to Jamie?

If you’re like most people, the answer is no. You’re supposed to be collaborating, and you don’t want to be told what to do, so you resist Jamie’s influence. In trying to establish dominance, Jamie has lost prestige. But what if Jamie makes the same suggestion, talking more tentatively, and adding some questions and hedges?

Do you think the flashlight should maybe be rated higher? It may be a pretty reliable night signaling device. Also, maybe the reflector and lens could be used to start a fire, which could possibly be another way to signal for help.

In Fragale’s study, people were much more receptive to this version. Powerless speech signals that Jamie is a giver. By [talking tentatively](#), Jamie shows a willingness to defer to you, or at least take your opinion into consideration. Fragale finds that even when Jamie delivers the exact same message in the exact same tone both times, adding markers of tentative talk such as hedges, tag questions, and intensifiers earns greater respect and influence. This is why the creative director was so open to Don Lane’s idea: Lane signaled that he wasn’t trying to threaten the director’s authority. It was clear to the creative director that Lane was just trying to share a good idea, and the director knew a good idea when he saw it.*

Over time, talking tentatively paid off for Lane. He brought ideas up gently and didn’t ask for credit. “Creative people responded to this approach, and it gave me credibility when I had a creative idea worth sharing,” Lane explains. Whereas many of his peers had conflicts with creative people, Lane developed a reputation for being a rare account guy with whom creative people enjoyed working. Instead of seeing him as an outsider stepping on their toes, they saw him as a helpful contributor. They frequently requested him on projects, often saying, “He’s helping us. He’s not a typical account guy. Let’s keep him involved and give him more opportunities.” Knowing that he was

generous and open, creative teams were willing to share ideas with him and welcome his input, rather than guarding their turf more closely.

Lane's ability to contribute to creative teams attracted the attention of senior management. At an unusually early stage in his career, Lane was invited to play a key role in the world-renowned "Drivers wanted" campaign for Volkswagen. "Givers fear that they'll become invisible," Lane says. "But I've seen givers thrive because people like working with and trust them. Realizing this was a major turbo boost early in my career." Lane was promoted more quickly than many of his peers, and he is now an executive vice president and executive director at Arnold. In the words of one creative vice president, "Don is a complete team player . . . If I have another opportunity to work with Don—I would jump at the chance."

An analysis of tentative talk points to another reason why Dave Walton's stutter might have helped him connect with the jury in the trade secrets trial. Hesitations, hedges, and intensifiers are built-in features of stuttering. When a jury hears Dave Walton stutter, he no longer sounds dominant and imposing. They don't feel that he's trying to convince them, so they lower their resistance. They become just a bit more open to being persuaded by him.

When givers use powerless speech, they show us that they have our best interests at heart. But there's one role in which people tend to avoid talking tentatively: leadership. Not long ago, a marketing manager named [Barton Hill](#) found out why. He was leading a business unit at a financial services firm, and he was invited to interview for a major promotion to a higher-level position, where he would lead multiple business units. The interviewer opened with a softball question: tell us about your successes. Hill started talking about his team's accomplishments, which were quite impressive.

Although Hill was the front-runner for the position, he didn't get it. The interviewer told him he didn't sound like a leader. "I kept using words like *we* and *us*," Hill says. "I didn't use enough first-person singular pronouns, like *I* and *me*. I found out later that it didn't seem like I was a leader. He thought I didn't drive the team's success, and wanted someone who could." The interviewer expected Hill to speak more assertively, and powerless communication cost him the job.

By speaking with greater speed, volume, assertiveness, and certainty, takers convince us that they know what they're talking about. In one study conducted by [psychologists in California](#), takers were judged by group members as more competent, but in reality, they weren't more competent. Takers, the study's authors report, "attain influence because they behave in ways that make them appear competent—even when they actually lack competence."

By failing to use powerful speech in his interview, Barton Hill failed to create the impression of dominance. Yet the same powerless communication that cost him the promotion ended up earning prestige, making his teams successful. Whereas powerful communication might be effective in a one-shot job interview, in a team or a service relationship, it loses the respect and admiration of others. [Psychologists in Amsterdam](#) have shown that although group members perceive takers as highly effective leaders, takers actually undermine group performance. Speaking dominantly convinces group members that takers are powerful, but it stifles information sharing, preventing members from communicating good ideas. "Teams love it when their leader presents a work product as a collaborative effort. That's what inspires them to contribute," Hill reflects. "The paradox comes from people thinking an inclusive leader isn't strong enough to lead a team, when in fact that leader is stronger, because he engenders the support of the team. People bond to givers, like

electromagnetism.” Eventually, Hill left for another company, and three of his former employees approached him about joining his team. This type of loyalty has paid off in the long run: Hill’s teams have been wildly successful. He is now a managing director and global head of marketing at Citi Transaction Services, a division of more than twenty thousand people.

Of course, there’s a time and a place for leaders to use powerful speech. In a study of [pizza franchises](#), colleagues Francesca Gino, Dave Hofmann, and I found that when most employees in a store are dutiful followers, managers are well served to speak powerfully. But when most employees are proactive, generating new ideas for cooking and delivering pizzas more efficiently, powerful speech backfires. When employees were proactive, managers who talked forcefully led their stores to 14 percent lower profits than managers who talked less assertively and more tentatively. By conveying dominance, the powerful speakers discouraged their proactive employees from contributing. When people use powerful communication, others perceive them as “preferring and pursuing individual accomplishments,” Fragale writes, “at the expense of group accomplishments.” Through talking tentatively, the powerless speakers earned prestige: they showed openness to proactive ideas that would benefit the group.

To see if this effect would hold up in a more controlled setting, my colleagues and I brought teams of people together to fold T-shirts. We instructed half of the team leaders to talk forcefully, and asked the other half to talk more tentatively. Once again, when team members were passive followers, the powerful speakers did just fine. But when team members were highly proactive, taking initiative to come up with a faster way to fold T-shirts, the powerless speakers were much more effective. Proactive teams had 22 percent higher average output under leaders who spoke powerlessly than powerfully. Team members saw the powerful speakers as threatened by ideas, viewing the powerless speakers as more receptive to suggestions. Talking tentatively didn’t establish dominance, but it earned plenty of prestige. Team members worked more productively when the tentative talkers showed that they were open to advice.

To a taker, this receptivity to advice may sound like a weakness. By listening to other people’s suggestions, givers might end up being unduly influenced by their colleagues. But what if seeking advice is actually a strategy for influencing other people? When givers sit down at the bargaining table, they benefit from advice in unexpected ways.

Negotiating: Seeking Advice in the Shadow of a Doubt

In 2007, a *Fortune* 500 company closed a plant in the Midwest United States. One of the people to lose her position was an effervescent [research scientist](#) named Annie. The company offered Annie a transfer to the East Coast, but it would require her to give up on her education. While working full time, Annie was enrolled in a nighttime MBA program. She couldn't afford to quit her job, and if she did, the company would no longer pay for her degree. Yet if she accepted the transfer, she wouldn't be able to continue studying. She was in a bind, with little time and few options.

Two weeks later, something extraordinary happened: she was offered a seat on the company's private jet, which was normally available only to top executives, with unlimited access until she finished her MBA. She accepted the transfer and spent the next nine months riding the corporate jet back and forth, twice a week, until she finished her degree. The company also paid for her rental car every week and commercial plane tickets when the corporate jet wasn't running. How did she get the company to make such a big investment in her?

Annie landed all of these perks without ever negotiating. Instead, she used a form of powerless communication that's quite familiar to givers.

Entering negotiations, takers typically work to establish a dominant position. Had Annie been a taker, she might have compiled a list of all of her merits and attracted counteroffers from rival companies to strengthen her position. Matchers are more inclined to see negotiating as an opportunity for quid pro quo. If Annie were a matcher, she would have gone to a senior leader who owed her a favor and asked for reciprocity. But Annie is a giver: she mentors dozens of colleagues, volunteers for the United Way, and visits elementary school classes to interest students in science. When her colleagues make a mistake, she's regularly the one to take responsibility, shielding them from the blame at the expense of her own performance. She once withdrew a job application when she learned that a friend was applying for the same position.

As a giver, Annie wasn't comfortable bargaining like a taker or a matcher, so she chose an entirely different strategy. She reached out to a human resources manager and asked for advice. "If you were in my shoes, what would you do?"

The manager became Annie's advocate. She reached out to the heads of Annie's department and site, and started to lobby on Annie's behalf. The department head, in turn, called Annie and asked what he could do to keep her. Annie mentioned that she wanted to finish her MBA, but couldn't afford to fly back and forth. In response, the department head offered her a seat on the jet.

New research shows that advice seeking is a surprisingly effective strategy for [exercising influence when we lack authority](#). In one experiment, researcher Katie Liljenquist had people negotiate the possible sale of commercial property. When the sellers focused on their goal of getting the highest possible price, only 8 percent reached a successful agreement. When the sellers asked the buyers for advice on how to meet their goals, 42 percent reached a successful agreement. Asking for advice encouraged greater cooperation and information sharing, turning a potentially contentious negotiation into a win-win deal. Studies demonstrate that across the manufacturing, financial services, insurance, and pharmaceuticals industries, seeking advice is among the most [effective ways to influence](#) peers, superiors, and subordinates. Advice seeking tends to be significantly more persuasive than the taker's preferred tactics of pressuring subordinates and ingratiating superiors.

Advice seeking is also consistently more influential than the matcher's default approach of trading favors.

This is true even in the upper echelons of major corporations. Recently, strategy professors Ithai Stern and James Westphal studied executives at 350 large U.S. industrial and service firms, hoping to find out how executives land seats on boards of directors. [Board seats](#) are coveted by executives, as they often pay six-figure salaries, send clear status signals, and enrich networks by granting access to the corporate elite.

Takers assume that the best path to a board seat is ingratiation. They flatter a director with compliments, or track down his friends to praise him indirectly. Yet Stern and Westphal found that flattery only worked when it was coupled with advice seeking. Instead of just complimenting a director, executives who got board seats were more likely to seek advice along with the compliment. When praising a director's skill, the advice-seeking executives asked how she mastered it. When extolling a director's success in a task, these executives asked for recommendations about how to replicate his success. When executives asked a director for advice in this manner, that director was significantly more likely to recommend them for a board appointment—and they landed more board seats as a result.

Advice seeking is a form of powerless communication that combines expressing vulnerability, asking questions, and talking tentatively. When we ask others for advice, we're posing a question that conveys uncertainty and makes us vulnerable. Instead of confidently projecting that we have all the answers, we're admitting that others might have superior knowledge. As a result, takers and matchers tend to shy away from advice seeking. From a taker's perspective, asking for advice means acknowledging that you don't have all the answers. Takers may fear that seeking advice might make them look weak, dependent, or incompetent. They're wrong: research shows that people who [regularly seek advice and help](#) from knowledgeable colleagues are actually rated more favorably by supervisors than those who never seek advice and help.

Appearing vulnerable doesn't bother givers, who worry far less about protecting their egos and projecting certainty. When givers ask for advice, it's because they're genuinely interested in learning from others. Matchers hold back on advice seeking for a different reason: they might owe something in return.

According to Liljenquist, advice seeking has four benefits: learning, perspective taking, commitment, and flattery. When Annie asked for advice, she discovered something she didn't know before: the company's jet had extra seats, and it traveled back and forth between her two key locations. Had she lobbied more assertively instead of seeking advice, she might never have gained this information. In fact, Annie had several previous conversations in which no one mentioned the jet.

This brings us to the second benefit of advice seeking: encouraging others to take our perspectives. In Annie's previous conversations, where she didn't ask for advice, the department head focused on the company's interest in transferring her while saving as much money as possible. The advice request changed the conversation. When we ask for advice, in order to give us a recommendation, advisers have to look at the problem or dilemma from our point of view. It was only when Annie sought guidance that the department head ended up considering the problem from her perspective, at which point the corporate jet dawned on him as a solution.

Once the department head proposed this solution, the third benefit of advice seeking kicked in: commitment. The department head played a key role in generating the jet solution. Since it was his

idea and he had already invested some time and energy in trying to help Annie, he was highly motivated to help her further. He ended up paying for the rental car that she used in the Midwest and agreeing to fund commercial flights if the corporate jet was not running.

There's no doubt that Annie earned these privileges through a combination of hard work, talent, and generosity. But a clever study sheds further light on why the department head was so motivated to offer Annie more than just the corporate jet. Half a century ago, the psychologists Jon Jecker and David Landy paid people for succeeding on a geometry task. In the control group, the participants kept the money, and visited the department secretary to fill out a final questionnaire. But when another group of participants started to leave, the researcher asked them for help. "I was wondering if you would do me a favor. The funds for this experiment have run out and I am using my own money to finish the experiment. [As a favor to me](#), would you mind returning the money you won?"

Nearly all of the participants gave the money back. When questioned about how much they liked the researcher, the people who had done him the favor liked him substantially *more* than the people who didn't. Why?

When we give our time, energy, knowledge, or resources to help others, we strive to maintain a belief that they're worthy and deserving of our help. Seeking advice is a subtle way to invite someone to make a commitment to us. Once the department head took the time to offer advice to Annie, he became more invested in her. Helping Annie generate a solution reinforced his commitment to her: she must be worthy of his time. If she wasn't important to him, why would he have bothered to help her? As Benjamin Franklin wrote in his autobiography, "[He that has once done you a kindness](#) will be more ready to do you another than he whom you yourself have obliged."

When we ask people for advice, we grant them prestige, showing that we respect and admire their insights and expertise. Since most people are matchers, they tend to respond favorably and feel motivated to support us in return. When Annie approached the human resources manager for advice, the manager stepped up and went to bat for her. According to biographer Walter Isaacson, Benjamin Franklin saw advice seeking as a form of flattery. Franklin "had a [fundamental rule for winning friends](#)," Isaacson writes: appeal to "their pride and vanity by constantly seeking their opinion and advice, and they will admire you for your judgment and wisdom."

Regardless of their reciprocity styles, people love to be asked for advice. Giving advice makes takers feel important, and it makes givers feel helpful. Matchers often enjoy giving advice for a different reason: it's a low-cost way of racking up credits that they can cash in later. As a result, when we ask people for advice, they tend to respond positively to us.

But here's the catch: advice seeking only works if it's genuine. In her research on advice seeking, Liljenquist finds that success "depends on the target perceiving it as a sincere and authentic gesture." When she directly encouraged people to seek advice as an influence strategy, it fell flat. Their counterparts recognized them as fakers: they could tell that the advice seekers were ingratiating based on ulterior motives. "People who are suspected of strategically managing impressions are more likely to be seen as selfish, cold, manipulative, and untrustworthy," Liljenquist writes. Advice seeking was only effective when people did it spontaneously. Since givers are more willing to seek advice than takers and matchers, it's likely that many of the spontaneous advice seekers in her studies were givers. They were actually interested in other people's perspectives and recommendations, and they were rated as better listeners.

I believe this applies more generally to powerless communication: it works for givers because

they establish a sincere intent to act in the best interests of others. When presenting, givers make it clear that they're expressing vulnerability not only to earn prestige but also to make a genuine connection with the audience. When selling, givers ask questions in a way that conveys the desire to help customers, not take advantage of them. When persuading and negotiating, givers speak tentatively and seek advice because they truly value the ideas and viewpoints of others.

Powerless communication is the natural language of many givers, and one of the great engines behind their success. Expressing vulnerability, asking questions, talking tentatively, and seeking advice can open doors to gaining influence, but the way we direct that influence will reverberate throughout our work lives, including some we've already discussed, like building networks and collaborating with colleagues. As you'll see later, not every giver uses powerless communication, but those who do often find that it's useful in situations where we need to build rapport and trust. It can't easily be faked, but if you fake it long enough, it might become more real than you expected. And as Dave Walton discovered, powerless communication can be far more powerful and effective than meets the ear.

6

The Art of Motivation Maintenance

Why Some Givers Burn Out but Others Are On Fire

The intelligent altruists, though less altruistic than the unintelligent altruists, will be fitter than both unintelligent altruists and selfish individuals.

—Herbert Simon, Nobel Prize winner in economics

Up to this point, we've been focusing on how givers climb to the top of the success ladder through the unique ways that they build networks, collaborate, communicate, influence, and help others achieve their potential. But as you saw in the opening chapter, givers are also more likely to end up at the bottom of the success ladder. Success involves more than just capitalizing on the strengths of giving; it also requires avoiding the pitfalls. If people give too much time, they end up making sacrifices for their collaborators and network ties, at the expense of their own energy. If people give away too much credit and engage in too much powerless communication, it's all too easy for them to become pushovers and doormats, failing to advance their own interests. The consequence: givers end up exhausted and unproductive.

Since the strategies that catapult givers to the top are distinct from those that sink givers to the bottom, it's critical to understand what differentiates successful givers from failed givers. The next three chapters examine why some givers burn out while others are on fire; how givers avoid being exploited by takers; and what individuals, groups, and organizations can do to protect givers and spread their success.

Recently, the Canadian psychologists Jeremy Frimer and Larry Walker led an ambitious effort to figure out [what motivates highly successful givers](#). The participants were winners of the Caring Canadian Award, the country's highest honor for giving, recognizing people who have devoted many years of their lives to help their communities or advance a humanitarian cause. Many winners of this award have sustained extraordinary giving efforts for decades in order to make a difference.

To reveal what drove them, all of the participants filled out a questionnaire asking them to list ten

goals in response to “I typically try to . . .” Then, Walker conducted in-depth interviews with twenty-five Caring Canadian winners and a comparison group of twenty-five people who matched the winners in gender, age, ethnicity, and education, but had not sustained the same level or duration of giving. Walker spent a hundred hours interviewing all fifty people about their lives, covering key periods and critical events in childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. From there, independent raters read the goal lists, listened to the interview tapes, and rated the degree to which the participants expressed two key motivations: self-interest and other-interest. Self-interest involved pursuing power and achievement, whereas other-interest focused on being generous and helpful. On which set of motivations did the Caring Canadian winners score higher than the comparison group?

The intuitive answer is other-interest, and it’s correct. In their life stories, the Caring Canadians mentioned giving and helping more than three times as often as the comparison group. When they listed their goals, the Caring Canadians listed nearly twice as many goals related to other-interest as the comparison group. The Caring Canadians highlighted goals like “serve as a positive role model to young people” and “advocate for women from a low-income bracket.” The comparison participants were more likely to mention goals like “get my golf handicap to a single digit,” “be attractive to others,” and “hunt the biggest deer and catch big fish.”

But here’s the surprise: the Caring Canadians also scored higher on self-interest. In their life stories, these highly successful givers mentioned a quest for power and achievement almost twice as often as the comparison group. In their goals, the Caring Canadians had roughly 20 percent more objectives related to gaining influence, earning recognition, and attaining individual excellence. The successful givers weren’t just more other-oriented than their peers; they were also more self-interested. Successful givers, it turns out, are just as ambitious as takers and matchers.

These results have fascinating implications for our understanding of why some givers succeed but others fail. Up until this point, we’ve looked at reciprocity styles on a continuum from taking to giving: is your primary concern for your own interests or others’ interests? Now I want to complicate that understanding by looking at the interplay of self-interest and other-interest. Takers score high in self-interest and low in other-interest: they aim to maximize their own success without much concern for other people. By contrast, givers always score high on other-interest, but they vary in self-interest. There are two types of givers, and they have dramatically different success rates.

Selfless givers are people with high other-interest and low self-interest. They give their time and energy without regard for their own needs, and they pay a price for it. Selfless giving is a form of [pathological altruism](#), which is defined by researcher Barbara Oakley as “an unhealthy focus on others to the detriment of one’s own needs,” such that in the process of trying to help others, givers end up harming themselves. In one study, college students who scored high on selfless giving declined in grades over the course of the semester. These selfless givers admitted “missing class and [failing to study](#) because they were attending to friends’ problems.”

Most people assume that self-interest and other-interest are opposite ends of one continuum. Yet in my studies of what drives people at work, I’ve consistently found that self-interest and other-interest are [completely independent motivations](#): you can have both of them at the same time. As Bill Gates argued at the World Economic Forum, “there are [two great forces of human nature](#): self-interest, and caring for others,” and people are most successful when they are driven by a “hybrid engine” of the two. If takers are selfish and failed givers are selfless, successful givers are *otherish*: they care about benefiting others, but they also have ambitious goals for advancing their own

interests.



Selfless giving, in the absence of self-preservation instincts, easily becomes overwhelming. Being otherish means being willing to give more than you receive, but still keeping your own interests in sight, using them as a guide for choosing when, where, how, and to whom you give. Instead of seeing self-interest and other-interest as competing, the Caring Canadians found ways to integrate them, so that they could do well by doing good. As you'll see, when concern for others is coupled with a healthy dose of concern for the self, givers are less prone to burning out and getting burned—and they're better positioned to flourish.

"In West Philadelphia, born and raised, on the playground is where I spent most of my days . . . I got in one little fight and my mom got scared . . ."

When Will Smith wrote these famous lyrics for the theme song of *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*, the hit sitcom that launched his career, he had just graduated from [Overbrook](#) High School in Philadelphia. Overbrook has a majestic façade, its five-story building resembling a castle perched atop a hill. During his time in the castle, Smith was treated like royalty, earning the nickname "Prince" from teachers for his ability to charm his way out of trouble. Years later, when he started a production company, he named it Overbrook Entertainment. Smith is not the only accomplished person to attend Overbrook, whose alumni include astronaut Guion Bluford Jr., the first African American in space, and Jon Drummond, an Olympic gold medalist in track. Overbrook is one of just six high schools in the entire United States that has seen more than ten students go on to play in the National Basketball Association, one of whom was the legendary Wilt Chamberlain.

But for most students, Overbrook is no fairy tale.

Located at the corner of Fifty-ninth and Lancaster in the heart of West Philadelphia, Overbrook is just a few blocks from one of the top ten drug corners in the country. Take a stroll past the school, and it's not uncommon to see the drivers of passing cars rolling up their windows and locking their doors. In 2006, Overbrook was one of twenty-eight schools in the United States that was identified as "persistently dangerous" based on crime statistics. As of 2011, there were roughly 1,200 students

enrolled at Overbrook, and nearly 500 were suspended at some point during the school year, racking up nearly fifty assaults and twenty weapons or drugs charges. The educational prospects for students are similarly dismal. On the SAT, Overbrook's average hovers more than three hundred points below the national average, with more than three quarters of students in the bottom 25 percent in the country. Nearly half of all students who start high school at Overbrook will never finish: the graduation rate is just 54 percent.

In the hopes of turning this tragic situation around, a corps of talented, passionate young educators has arrived at Overbrook from Teach For America (TFA), the renowned nonprofit organization that sends college graduates to spend two years fighting educational inequity as teachers in some of the most disadvantaged schools in the country. TFA is filled with givers: research shows that the vast majority of teachers join to make a difference in students' lives. Many come from privileged backgrounds, and they're determined to help students who are less fortunate. As one anonymous teacher put it:

I knew throughout my life that I wanted to do something where I help . . . Social justice issues burn within me and the fact that so many students have been so viciously failed by the school systems in this country is infuriating and invigorating. I want every child to grow up able to make choices . . . education can be an equalizer . . . it's a justice issue, and by joining TFA I saw a way to help make it my issue too.

In the past twenty years, more than twenty thousand teachers have worked for TFA, making tremendous strides toward promoting educational equity. But sheltered lives in suburbs and sororities leave many teachers dramatically unprepared for the trials and tribulations of inner-city schools.

In the Overbrook hallways, the school's massive difficulties fell hard on the shoulders of a twenty-four-year-old TFA neophyte named [Conrey Callahan](#). With white skin and blond hair, Conrey stood out in the halls like a sore thumb: 97 percent of Overbrook's students are African American. Conrey—a dog lover who lives with Louie, the mutt she rescued—grew up in a cozy Maryland suburb, attending a high school that was named one of the best in the country. Calling her a ball of energy would be an understatement: she runs half-marathons, captained her high school soccer and lacrosse teams, and competed for six years in jump rope competitions, making the junior Olympics. Although her intellectual prowess led her Vanderbilt professors to encourage her to pursue history, Conrey set her sights on more practical matters: “I set out to make a difference, improving education and opportunities for kids in low-income communities.”

But Conrey's idealistic dreams of inspiring the next generation of students were quickly crushed by the harsh realities of arriving at school at 6:45 A.M., staying up until 1:00 A.M. to finish grading and lesson plans for her Spanish classes, and days marked by breaking up fights, battling crime, and trying to track down truant students who only showed up for two days of class in an entire year. One of Conrey's most promising students was living in a foster home, and had to drop out of school after giving birth to a child with developmental problems.

Conrey was constantly complaining to one of her closest friends, an investment banker who worked a hundred hours a week and couldn't grasp why teaching at Overbrook was so stressful. In an act of desperation, Conrey invited the friend to join her on a school field trip. The friend finally

understood: “she couldn’t believe the sheer exhaustion that she felt at the end of the day,” Conrey recalls. Finally, Conrey hit rock bottom. “It was awful. I was burned out, overwhelmed, and ready to give up. I never wanted to set foot in a school again. I was disgusted with the school, the students, and myself.”

Conrey was displaying the classic symptoms of burnout, and she wasn’t alone. Berkeley psychologist Christina Maslach, the pioneer of research on [job burnout](#), reports that across occupational sectors, teaching has the highest rates of emotional exhaustion. One TFA teacher admires the organization but says it is “focused on hard work and dedication almost to a fault . . . you leave training with the mindset that unless you pour every waking hour of your life into the job then you’re doing a disservice to your kids.” Of all TFA teachers, more than half leave after their two-year contract is up, and more than 80 percent are gone after three years. About a third of all TFA alumni walk away from education altogether.

Since givers tend to put others’ interests ahead of their own, they often help others at the expense of their own well-being, placing themselves at risk for burnout. Four decades of extensive research shows that when people become burned out, their job performance suffers. Exhausted employees struggle to focus their attention and lack the energy to work their hardest, longest, and smartest, so the quality and quantity of their work takes a nosedive. They also suffer from poorer emotional and physical health. Strong evidence reveals that burned-out employees are at heightened risk for depression, physical fatigue, sleep disruptions, impaired immune systems, alcohol abuse, and even cardiovascular disease.

When Conrey hit rock bottom at Overbrook High School, she felt that she was giving too much. She was arriving at work early, staying up late, and working weekends, and she could hardly keep up. In this situation, it seems that the natural way to recover and recharge would be to reduce her giving. But that wasn’t what she did. Instead, Conrey gave *more*.

While maintaining her overwhelming teaching workload, Conrey began volunteering her time as a TFA alumni mentor. As a content support specialist, every other week she helped ten different teachers create tests and design new lesson plans. Then, in her limited spare time, she founded a mentoring program. With two friends, she created a Philadelphia chapter of Minds Matter, a national nonprofit organization that helps high-achieving, low-income students prepare for college. Conrey spent her nights and weekends filing for nonprofit status, finding a pro-bono law firm and accountant, and applying for national approval. Finally, after a year, she was able to start recruiting students and mentors, and she created the plans for weekly sessions. From then on, Conrey added five hours a week mentoring high school students.

All told, Conrey was spending more than ten extra hours per week giving. This meant even less room in her schedule for relaxation or restorative downtime, and even more responsibility to others. And yet, when she started giving more, Conrey’s burnout faded, and her energy returned. Suddenly, in fact, she seemed to be a renewed bundle of energy at Overbrook, finding the strength to serve as the coordinator for gifted students and create a Spanish 3 program from scratch. Unlike many of her peers, she didn’t quit. Of the five teachers who joined Overbrook from TFA with her, Conrey was the only one still teaching there after four years. Of the dozen teachers who arrived in the same three-year window as her, Conrey was one of just two left. She became one of the rare TFA teachers who continued teaching for at least four years, and she was nominated for a national teaching award. How is it possible that giving more revitalized her, instead of draining her?

The Impact Vacuum: Givers Without a Cause

A decade ago, Howard Heevner, a dynamic director of a university [call center](#), invited me to help him figure out how to maintain the motivation of his callers. The callers were charged with contacting university alumni and asking them to donate money. They were required to ask for donations three times before hanging up, and still faced a rejection rate exceeding 90 percent. Even the most seasoned and successful callers were burning out. As one experienced caller put it: “I found the calls I was making to be extremely difficult. Many of the prospects cut me off in my first couple of sentences and told me they were not interested in giving.”

I assumed that the takers were dropping like flies: they wouldn’t be as committed as the givers. So during training, I measured whether each caller was a giver, matcher, or taker. In their first month on the job, the takers were bringing in an average of more than thirty donations a week. Contrary to my expectation, the givers were much less productive: they were struggling to maintain their motivation, making fewer calls and bringing in under ten donations a week. I was mystified: why were the callers who wanted to make a difference actually making the least difference?

I got my answer one day when I paid a visit to the call center, and noticed a sign one of the callers had posted above his desk:

DOING A GOOD JOB HERE

Is Like Wetting Your Pants in a Dark Suit

YOU GET A WARM FEELING BUT NO ONE ELSE NOTICES

According to my data, the caller who proudly displayed this sign was a strong giver. Why would a giver feel unappreciated? In reflecting on this sign, I began to think that my initial assumption was correct after all: based on the motivational structure of the job, the givers should be outpacing the takers. The problem was that the givers were being deprived of the rewards they find most energizing.

The takers were motivated by the fact that they were working at the highest-paying job on campus. But the givers lacked the rewards that mattered most to them. Whereas takers tend to care most about benefiting personally from their jobs, givers care deeply about doing jobs that benefit other people. When the callers brought in donations, most of the money went directly to student scholarships, but the callers were left in the dark: they had no idea who was receiving the money, and how it affected their lives.

At the next training session, I invited new callers to read letters from students whose scholarships had been funded by the callers’ work. One scholarship student named Will wrote:

When it came down to making the decision, I discovered that the out-of-state tuition was quite expensive. But this university is in my blood. My grandparents met here. My dad and his four brothers all went here. I even owe my younger

brother to this school—he was conceived the night we won the NCAA basketball tournament. All my life I have dreamed of coming here. I was ecstatic to receive the scholarship, and I came to school ready to take full advantage of the opportunities it afforded me. The scholarship has improved my life in many ways . . .

After reading the letters, it took the givers just a week to catch up to the takers. The takers did show some improvement, but the givers responded most powerfully, nearly tripling in weekly calls and donations. Now, they had a stronger emotional grasp of their impact: if they brought in more money, they could help more scholarship students like Will. By spending just five minutes reading about how the job helped other people, the givers were motivated to achieve the same level of productivity as the takers.

But the givers still weren't seeing the full impact of their jobs. Instead of reading letters, what if they actually met a scholarship recipient face-to-face? When callers interacted with one scholarship recipient in person, they were even more energized. The average caller doubled in calls per hour and minutes on the phone per week. By working harder, the callers reached more alumni, resulting in 144 percent more alumni donating each week. Even more strikingly, revenue quintupled: callers averaged \$412 before meeting the scholarship recipient and more than \$2,000 afterward. One caller soared from averages of five calls and \$100 per shift to nineteen calls and \$2,615 per shift. Several control groups of callers, who didn't meet a scholarship recipient, showed no changes in calls, phone time, donations, or revenue. Overall, just five minutes interacting with one scholarship recipient motivated twenty-three callers to raise an extra \$38,451 for the university in a single week.* Although the givers, takers, and matchers were all motivated by meeting the scholarship recipient, the gains in effort and revenue were especially pronounced among the givers.

The turnaround highlights a remarkable principle of giver burnout: it has less to do with the amount of giving and more with the amount of feedback about the impact of that giving. Researchers have drawn the same conclusion in health care, where burnout is often described as [compassion fatigue](#), “the stress, strain, and weariness of caring for others.” Originally, experts believed that compassion fatigue was caused by expressing too much compassion. But new research has challenged this conclusion. As researchers Olga Klimecki and Tania Singer summarize, “More than all other factors, including . . . the time spent caregiving, it is the perceived suffering that leads to depressive symptoms in the caregiver.” Givers don't burn out when they devote too much time and energy to giving. They burn out when they're working with people in need but are unable to help effectively.

Teachers are vulnerable to giver burnout because of the unique temporal experience that defines education. Even though teachers interact with their students on a daily basis, it can take many years for their impact to sink in. By then, students have moved on, and teachers are left wondering: did my work actually matter? With no clear affirmation of the benefits of their giving, the effort becomes more exhausting and harder to sustain. These challenges are pervasive in a setting like Overbrook, where teachers must fight many distractions and disadvantages to stimulate the attention—let alone attendance—of students. When Conrey Callahan was emotionally exhausted, it wasn't because she was giving too much. It was because she didn't feel her giving was making a difference. “In teaching, do I have an impact? It's kind of dicey,” Conrey told me. “I often feel like I'm not doing anything effective, that I'm wasting my time and I'm not making a difference.”

When Conrey launched Minds Matter Philadelphia, she may have been bulking up her schedule, but the net effect was to fill the impact vacuum that she experienced in her teaching job at Overbrook. “With my mentoring program, there’s no doubt; I know that I have a more direct impact,” she says. By mentoring low-income students who were high achievers, she felt able to make more of a difference than in her Overbrook classroom, where each student presented specific challenges. When she mentored high-achieving students, the positive feedback came more rapidly and validated her effort. She watched one mentee, David, blossom from a shy, reserved loner into an outspoken young man with a close group of friends. As with the fund-raising callers meeting a scholarship student who benefited from their work, seeing the impact of her program had an energizing effect.

But that effect wasn’t limited to the mentoring program. Thanks to the energy boost, Conrey developed renewed hope that she could have an impact in her job at Overbrook. Observing the progress of her high-achieving mentees instilled confidence that she could help the students struggling in her own classroom. “I know what I’ve started is really making a difference with these kids. What I’ve seen in three months is a big change for them, and they make me realize how great kids can be.” As she spent more time mentoring students at Minds Matter, she walked into her Overbrook classroom with greater enthusiasm, fueled by a revitalized sense of purpose.

In research with two colleagues, I’ve discovered that the perception of impact serves as a [buffer against stress](#), enabling employees to avoid burnout and maintain their motivation and performance. In one study, a student and I found that high school teachers who perceived their jobs as stressful and demanding reported significantly greater burnout. But upon closer inspection, job stress was only linked to higher burnout for teachers who felt they didn’t make a difference. A sense of lasting impact protected against stress, preventing exhaustion.

In the classroom, it sometimes takes years for a teacher’s lesson to hit home with students. By that time, many teachers have lost contact with their students. But at least for a while, teachers have the opportunity to see their short-term impact as they interact face-to-face with their students. Many other jobs provide no contact at all with the people who benefit from our work. In health care, for example, many medical professionals provide critical diagnoses without ever meeting the patients on the other end of their test results. In Israel, a group of [radiologists](#) evaluated nearly a hundred computed tomography (CT) exams from patients. After three months passed, the radiologists had forgotten the original CT exams, and they evaluated them again. Some of the radiologists got better, showing 53 percent improvement in detecting abnormalities unrelated to the primary reason for the exams. But other radiologists got worse: their accuracy dropped by 28 percent—on the exact same CT exams, in just three months. Why did some radiologists get better while others got worse?

Their patients had been photographed before their exams. Half of the radiologists completed their first CT exams without a patient’s photo. When they did their second CT exams three months later, they saw the photo. These were the radiologists who improved by 53 percent. The other half of the radiologists saw the patient photo in their first CT exams, and then completed their second CT exams three months later with no photo. These were the radiologists who deteriorated by 28 percent.

Attaching a single patient’s photo to a CT exam increased diagnostic accuracy by 46 percent. And roughly 80 percent of the key diagnostic findings came *only when the radiologists saw the patient’s photo*. The radiologists missed these important findings when the photo was absent—even if they caught them three months earlier. When the radiologists saw the patient’s photo, they felt more empathy. By encouraging empathy, the photos motivated the radiologists to conduct their diagnoses

more carefully. Their reports were 29 percent longer when the CT exams included patient photos. When the radiologists saw a photo of a patient, they felt a stronger connection to the human impact of their work. A patient photo “makes each CT scan unique,” said one radiologist.

In a recent study, researcher Nicola Bellé found similar patterns in a study of ninety [Italian nurses](#) who were invited to assemble surgical kits. After being randomly assigned to meet health-care practitioners who would use the kits, nurses were significantly more productive and more accurate. This effect was particularly pronounced among nurses who had reported strong giver tendencies in a survey. Interestingly, a week after meeting the health-care practitioners who benefited from the surgical kits, all of the nurses actually felt more inclined toward giving. Along with reducing burnout among givers, a firsthand connection to impact can tilt people of all reciprocity styles in the giver direction. When people know how their work makes a difference, they feel energized to contribute more.

Building on this idea that seeing impact can reduce the burnout of givers and motivate others to give, some organizations have designed initiatives to connect employees to the impact of their products and services. At [Wells Fargo](#), a vice president named Ben Soccorsy created videos of customers talking about how the company’s low-interest loans helped them reduce and eliminate their unwanted debt. “In many cases, customers felt like they had a massive weight lifted off their shoulders: they now had a plan for paying down their debt,” Soccorsy says. When bankers watched the videos, “it was like a light switch turned on. Bankers realized the impact their work could have—that this loan can really make a difference in customers’ lives. It was a really compelling motivator.” At Medtronic, employees across the company—from engineers to salespeople—pay visits to hospitals to see their medical technologies benefiting patients. “When they’re exhausted,” former Medtronic CEO Bill George told me, “it’s very important that they get out there and see procedures. They can see their impact on patients, which reminds them that they’re here to restore people to full life and health.” Medtronic also holds an annual party for the entire company, more than thirty thousand employees, at which six patients are invited to share their stories about how the company’s products have changed their lives. When they see for the first time how much their work can matter, many employees break down into tears.

Having a greater impact is one of the reasons why, counterintuitive as it might seem, giving more can actually help givers avoid burnout. But it’s not the whole story. There’s a second reason why Conrey’s extra giving was energizing, and it has to do with where and to whom she gave. Nearly a century ago, the psychologist [Anitra Karsten](#) invited people to work on repetitive tasks for as long as they enjoyed them, but to stop when they were tired. For long periods of time, the participants toiled away at tasks like drawing pictures and reading poems aloud, until they couldn’t handle it any longer. One man’s task was to write *ababab* over and over. As the Harvard psychologist Ellen Langer retells it, “He went on until he was mentally and physically exhausted. His hand felt numb, as though it couldn’t move to make even one more mark. At that moment the investigator asked him to sign his name and address for a different purpose. He did so quite easily.”

The same strange thing happened to other participants. One woman said she was so drained that she couldn’t lift her arm to make another mark. But she then lifted her arm to adjust her hair, apparently without any difficulty or discomfort. And when participants read poems aloud until their voices were hoarse, they had no trouble complaining about the task—and when they complained, they didn’t sound hoarse anymore. According to Langer, they weren’t faking it. Rather, “the change of

context brought renewed energy.”

When Conrey volunteered as a mentor to TFA teachers, it created a change of context that made giving feel fresh. “Working with adults, doing something that is kind of teaching, that doesn’t burn me out. That invigorates me,” Conrey says. Giving more can be exhausting if it’s in the same domain. Instead of giving more in the same way, over and over, she expanded her contributions to a different group of people. The same thing happened when she started mentoring high school students at Minds Matter: she had a new setting and a new group of people to help. Instead of teaching them Spanish, she was getting them ready for college. By shifting her giving to a novel domain, she was able to recharge her energy.

Otherish Choices: Chunking, Sprinkling, and the 100-Hour Rule of Volunteering

We discussed otherish behavior at the beginning of this chapter, and in both Conrey's example and that of the fund-raising callers, the distinction between selfless givers and otherish givers begins to come into play. In these contexts, decisions about how, where, and how much to give clearly make a difference when it comes to burning out or firing up. It might seem that by giving more, Conrey was being selfless. But what she actually did was create an opportunity for giving that was also personally rewarding, drawing energy from the visible impact of her contributions. To be more selfless, in this case, would have meant giving even more at school, where endless help was needed, but where she felt limited in her ability to make a difference. Instead, Conrey thought more about her own well-being and found a way to improve it by giving in a new way.

That choice has real consequences for givers. In numerous studies, Carnegie Mellon psychologist Vicki Helgeson has found that when people [give continually without concern for their own well-being](#), they're at risk for poor mental and physical health.* Yet when they give in a more otherish fashion, demonstrating substantial concern for themselves as well as others, they no longer experience health costs. In one study, people who maintained equilibrium between benefiting themselves and others even achieved significant increases in happiness and life satisfaction over a six-month period.*

To gain a deeper understanding of otherish and selfless givers, it's worth looking more closely at the decisions they make about when and how much to give. It turns out that Conrey's giving helped her avoid burnout not only due to the variety but also because of how she planned it.

Imagine that you're going to perform five [random acts of kindness](#) this week. You'll be doing things like helping a friend with a project, writing a thank-you note to a former teacher, donating blood, and visiting an elderly relative. You can choose one of two different ways to organize your giving: chunking or sprinkling. If you're a chunker, you'll pack all five acts of giving into a single day each week. If you're a sprinkler, you'll distribute your giving evenly across five different days, so that you give a little bit each day. Which do you think would make you happier: chunking or sprinkling?

In this study, led by the psychologist Sonja Lyubomirsky, people performed five random acts of kindness every week for six weeks. They were randomly divided into two groups: half chunked their giving into a single day each week, and the other half sprinkled it across all five days each week. At the end of the six weeks, despite performing the same number of helping acts, only one group felt significantly happier.

The chunkers achieved gains in happiness; the sprinklers didn't. Happiness increased when people performed all five giving acts in a single day, rather than doing one a day. Lyubomirsky and colleagues speculate that "spreading them over the course of a week might have diminished their salience and power or made them less distinguishable from participants' habitual kind behavior."

Like the participants who became happier, Conrey was a chunker. At Minds Matter, Conrey packed her volunteering into one day a week, giving all five weekly hours of mentoring high school students on Saturdays. By chunking her giving into weekly blocks, she was able to experience her impact more vividly, leading her efforts to feel like "more than a drop in the bucket."

Chunking giving is an otherish strategy. Instead of mentoring students after school, when she was already exhausted, Conrey reserved it for the weekend, when her energy was recharged and it was

more convenient in her schedule. In contrast, selfless givers are more inclined to sprinkle their giving throughout their days, helping whenever people need them. This can become highly distracting and exhausting, robbing selfless givers of the attention and energy necessary to complete their own work.

One September, seventeen [software engineers](#) at a *Fortune* 500 company were charged with developing code for a major new product. It was a color laser printer that would sell for 10 percent of the cost of other products on the market. If it succeeded, the company would be a dominant player in the market and could release an entire family of products to follow the printer. The division was losing money rapidly, and if the printer wasn't ready on time, the division would fold. To finish the project, the engineers were working nights and weekends, but they were still behind schedule. The odds were against them: only once in the division's history had a product been launched on time. They were "stressed" and "exhausted," writes Harvard professor Leslie Perlow, with "insufficient time to meet all the demands on them."

The engineers had fallen into a pattern of selfless giving: they were constantly helping their colleagues solve problems. One engineer reported that "The biggest frustration of my job is always having to help others and not getting my own work done"; another lamented that "The problem with my work style is that responsiveness breeds more need for responsiveness, and I am so busy responding, I cannot get my own work done." On a typical day, an engineer named Andy worked from 8:00 A.M. until 8:15 P.M. It wasn't until after 5:00 P.M. that Andy found a block of time longer than twenty minutes to work on his core task. In the hopes of carving out time to get their own work done, engineers like Andy began arriving at work early in the morning and staying late at night. This was a short-lived solution: as more engineers burned the midnight oil, the interruptions occurred around the clock. The engineers were giving more time without making more progress, and it was exhausting.

Perlow had an idea for turning these selfless givers into otherish givers. She proposed that instead of sprinkling their giving, they could chunk it. She worked with the engineers to create dedicated windows for quiet time and interaction time. After experimenting with several different schedules, Perlow settled on holding quiet time three days a week, starting in the morning and lasting until noon. During quiet time, the engineers worked alone, and their colleagues knew to avoid interrupting them. The rest of the time, colleagues were free to seek help and advice.

When Perlow polled the engineers about quiet time, two thirds reported above-average productivity. When Perlow stepped back and left it to the engineers to manage their own quiet time for a full month, 47 percent maintained above-average productivity. By chunking their helping time, the engineers were able to conserve time and energy to complete their own work, making a transition from selfless to otherish giving. In the words of one engineer, quiet time enabled "me to do some of the activities during the day which I would have normally deferred to late evening." After three months, the engineers launched the laser printer on time, for only the second time in division history. The vice president of the division chalked the success up to the giving boundaries created by quiet time: "I do not think we could have made the deadline without this project."

Since the engineers were facing an urgent need to finish their product on time, they had a strong justification for making their giving more otherish. But in many situations, the appropriate boundaries for giving time are much murkier. [Sean Hagerty](#) is a principal in investment management at Vanguard, a financial services company that specializes in mutual funds. Sean is a dedicated mentor with a long-standing passion for education, and he has made a habit of volunteering his time at least a week each year to teach employees at Vanguard's corporate university. When Vanguard's chief learning officer

counted his hours, she noticed that Sean was spending a large amount of time in the classroom. She was worried that he would burn out, and Sean recognized that he might be at risk: “It’s a pretty significant commitment given that I have a day job.” But instead of scaling back his hours, Sean asked for more: “It’s among the most valuable things that I do.” The more hours he volunteered teaching, the more energized he felt, until he approached two weeks and cleared one hundred hours of annual volunteering on educational initiatives.

One hundred seems to be a magic number when it comes to giving. In a study of more than two thousand [Australian adults](#) in their mid-sixties, those who volunteered between one hundred and eight hundred hours per year were happier and more satisfied with their lives than those who volunteered fewer than one hundred or more than eight hundred hours annually. In another study, [American adults](#) who volunteered at least one hundred hours in 1998 were more likely to be alive in 2000. There were no benefits of volunteering more than one hundred hours. This is the *100-hour rule* of volunteering. It appears to be the range where giving is maximally energizing and minimally draining.

A hundred hours a year breaks down to just two hours a week. Research shows that if people start volunteering two hours a week, their happiness, satisfaction, and self-esteem go up a year later. Two hours a week in a fresh domain appears to be the sweet spot where people make a meaningful difference without being overwhelmed or sacrificing other priorities. It’s also the range in which volunteering is most likely to strike a healthy balance, offering benefits to the volunteer as well as the recipients.* In a national study, several thousand Canadians reported the number of hours that they volunteered per year, and whether they gained new technical, social, or organizational knowledge and skills from volunteering. For the first few hours a week, volunteers gained knowledge and skills at a consistent rate. By five hours a week, volunteering had [diminishing returns](#): people were learning less and less with each additional hour. After eleven hours a week, additional time volunteered no longer added new knowledge and skills.

When Conrey started volunteering as an alumni mentor for TFA, she was giving about seventy-five hours a year. When she launched Minds Matter, the nonprofit mentoring program for high school students, she sailed over the 100-hour mark. Perhaps it’s not a coincidence that her energy was restored right around that point. But it wasn’t just the amount of time that mattered; there’s another form of chunking in Conrey’s giving that’s also apparent in Sean Hagerty’s giving, and it reveals a key contrast between selfless and otherish giving.

As Sean Hagerty spent more time teaching in the Vanguard classroom, he began to crave more opportunities for giving. “I want to leave the place better than I entered it in my small way,” he says, and he began asking himself how he could have an impact on the world. As he reflected on different ways of giving, he noticed a pattern in how he was spending his free time. “I found myself reading more and more about education. I had a natural passion for it.” Sean decided to lead and launch two new programs around education. One program is called The Classroom Economy, and it has a national focus: Sean and his colleagues teach the basics of money management to kindergartners around the United States. The other program, Team Vanguard, is local: Sean has partnered with a charter school in Philadelphia to administer a four-year mentoring program, where employees volunteer their time on evenings, weekends, and lunch breaks. Despite the substantial time commitment, Sean found that both programs “have a tremendously positive impact on my energy. It’s the selling point I have with senior staff who worry about volunteer hours, which take time out of the day. It does sometimes, but my point of view is that it creates a much more highly engaged employee,

including me. I love that work is giving me an outlet for philanthropic interests.”

If Sean were a purely selfless giver, he might sprinkle his energy across many different causes out of a sense of duty and obligation, regardless of his own level of interest and enthusiasm for them. Instead, he adopts an otherish approach, choosing to chunk his giving to focus on education, a cause about which he’s passionate. “I get incredible personal satisfaction out of giving back to the community in this way,” Sean says.

Psychologists Netta Weinstein and Richard Ryan have demonstrated that [giving has an energizing effect](#) only if it’s an enjoyable, meaningful choice rather than undertaken out of duty and obligation. In one study, people reported their giving every day for two weeks, indicating whether they had helped someone or done something for a good cause. On days when they gave, they rated why they gave. On some days, people gave due to enjoyment and meaning—they thought it was important, cared about the other person, and felt they might enjoy it. On other days, they gave out of duty and obligation—they felt they had to and would feel like a bad person if they didn’t. Each day, they reported how energized they felt.

Weinstein and Ryan measured changes in energy from day to day. Giving itself didn’t affect energy: people weren’t substantially happier on days when they helped others than on days that they didn’t. But the reasons for giving mattered immensely: on days that people helped others out of a sense of enjoyment and purpose, they experienced significant gains in energy.* Giving for these reasons conferred a greater sense of autonomy, mastery, and connection to others, and it boosted their energy. When I studied [firefighters and fund-raising callers](#), I found the same pattern: they were able to work much harder and longer when they gave their energy and time due to a sense of enjoyment and purpose, rather than duty and obligation.

For Conrey, this is a major difference between teaching at Overbrook and volunteering with Minds Matter and TFA. In the Overbrook classroom, giving is an obligation. Her job requires her to break up fights and maintain order, tasks that—although important—don’t align with the passion that drew her into teaching. In her volunteer work, giving is an enjoyable choice: she loves helping high-achieving underprivileged students and mentoring less experienced TFA teachers. This is another way giving can be otherish: Conrey focused on benefiting students and teachers, but doing so in a way that connects to her core values and fuels her enthusiasm. The energy carried over to her classroom, helping her maintain her motivation.

But at Overbrook, Conrey couldn’t avoid the obligation to give to her students in ways that she didn’t find naturally exciting or energizing. What did she do to stay energized despite the sense of duty?

During one particularly stressful week, Conrey was struggling to get through to her students. “I was feeling miserable, and the kids were being awful.” She approached a teacher named Sarah for help. Sarah recommended an activity that was a hit in her classroom: they got to design their own monsters that were on the loose in Philadelphia. They drew a picture of a monster, wrote a story about it, and created a “wanted” ad so people would be on the lookout. It was exactly the inspiration that Conrey needed. “Our ten-minute chat helped me get excited about the lesson. I had fun with the kids, and it made me more invested in the curriculum I was teaching.”

Although Conrey’s decision to ask another teacher for help may not sound unusual, research shows that it’s quite rare among selfless givers. Selfless givers “feel uncomfortable receiving support,” write Helgeson and colleague Heidi Fritz. Selfless givers are determined to be in the helper

role, so they're reluctant to burden or inconvenience others. Helgeson and Fritz find that selfless givers receive far less support than otherish givers, which proves psychologically and physically costly. As burnout expert Christina Maslach and colleagues conclude, "there is now a consistent and strong body of evidence that a lack of social support is linked to burnout."

In contrast, otherish givers recognize the importance of protecting their own well-being. When they're on the brink of burnout, otherish givers seek help, which enables them to marshal the advice, assistance, and resources necessary to maintain their motivation and energy. Three decades of research show that receiving support from colleagues is a [robust antidote to burnout](#). "Having a support network of teachers is huge," Conrey affirms.

But Overbrook didn't have a formal support network of teachers, so where did Conrey get her support network? She built one at Overbrook through the act of giving help.

For many years, experts believed that the stress response involved a choice: *fight or flight*. Since burnout means we lack the energy to fight, it's natural to choose flight, coping by avoiding the source of stress. Burnout experts Jonathon Halbesleben and Matthew Bowler studied professional firefighters over a two-year period. Sure enough, when the firefighters [started to burn out](#), their performance ratings dropped. Burnout made them less concerned about achievement and status. Consequently, they invested less effort in their work, and their effectiveness suffered.

But surprisingly, in this study, burnout didn't decrease effort across the board. There was one place where firefighters actually *increased* their effort when they felt burned out: helping others. When the firefighters experienced signs of burnout, they were more likely to go out of their way to help colleagues with heavy workloads, share new knowledge with supervisors, give advice to newer colleagues, and even listen to colleagues' problems. Why would burnout increase their giving?

UCLA psychologist Shelley Taylor has discovered a stress response that differs from fight or flight. She calls it [tend and befriend](#). "One of the most striking aspects of the human stress response is the tendency to affiliate—that is, to come together in groups to provide and receive joint protection in threatening times." Taylor's neuroscience research reveals that when we feel stressed, the brain's natural response is to release chemicals that drive us to bond. This is what the firefighters did: when they started to feel exhausted, they invested their limited energy in helping their colleagues. Intuitively, they recognized that giving would strengthen their relationships and build support (at least from matchers and givers). Although most givers are aware of this opportunity, it appears that only otherish givers actually take advantage of it.

Conrey Callahan built her support network by tending and befriending under stress. When she was at the pinnacle of exhaustion, she started mentoring TFA teachers and several of the younger teachers in her own school. One of the teachers Conrey mentored was Sarah. In the course of mentoring, one of the exercises that Conrey taught Sarah was the monster activity. Conrey had forgotten about it, and when she reached out for help, Sarah reminded her about it. The advice itself was helpful, but it also strengthened Conrey's sense of impact: she had given Sarah an activity that was a big hit with her own students.

Otherish givers build up a support network that they can access for help when they need it. This, along with chunking giving so that it's energizing, is what makes otherish givers less vulnerable to burnout than selfless givers. But how do otherish givers stack up against takers and matchers?

The Myth of Giver Burnout

Years ago, Dutch psychologists studied hundreds of [health professionals](#). They tracked the amount of time and energy that the health professionals gave to patients, and asked them to report how burned out they felt. A year later, the psychologists measured giving and burnout again. Sure enough, the more the health professionals gave, the more burned out they became in the following year. Those who gave selflessly had the highest burnout rates: they contributed far more than they got, and it exhausted them. Those who acted like matchers and takers were far less burned out.

But strangely, in another study, the Dutch psychologists found evidence that some health care professionals seemed immune to burnout. Even when they gave a great deal of time and energy, they didn't exhaust themselves. These resilient health care professionals were otherish givers: they reported that they enjoyed helping other people and often went out of their way to do so, but weren't afraid to seek help when they needed it. The otherish givers had significantly lower burnout rates than the matchers and takers, who lacked the stamina to keep contributing. This study pointed to an unexpected possibility: although matchers and takers appear to be less vulnerable to burnout than selfless givers, the greatest resilience may belong to otherish givers.

Part of the reason for this is illuminated in fascinating work by Northwestern University psychologists Elizabeth Seeley and Wendi Gardner, who asked people to work on a difficult task that sapped their [willpower](#). For example, imagine that you're very hungry, and you're staring at a plate of delicious chocolate chip cookies, but you have to resist the temptation to eat them. After using up their willpower in a task like this, participants squeezed a handgrip as long as they could. The typical participant was able to hold on for twenty-five seconds. But there was a group of people who were able to hold on 40 percent longer, lasting for thirty-five seconds.

The participants with unusually high stamina scored high on a questionnaire measuring "other-directedness." These other-directed people operated like givers. By consistently overriding their selfish impulses in order to help others, they had strengthened their psychological muscles, to the point where using willpower for painful tasks was no longer exhausting. In support of this idea, other studies have shown that givers accrue an advantage in controlling their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. Over time, giving may build willpower like weight lifting builds muscles. Of course, we all know that when muscles are overused, they fatigue and sometimes even tear—this is what happens to selfless givers.

In [Utah](#), a seventy-five-year-old man understands the resilience of otherish givers. His name is Jon Huntsman Sr., and his tiny photo from his company's annual report appeared in chapter 2, in juxtaposition with the full-size photo of Kenneth Lay (you might also recognize him as the father of former Utah governor and 2012 Republican presidential candidate Jon Huntsman Jr.). Back in 1990, the elder Huntsman was negotiating an acquisition with Charles Miller Smith, who was the president and CEO of a chemical company. During the negotiations, Smith's wife died. Huntsman empathized with Smith, so he decided not to push any further: "I decided the fine points of the last 20 percent of the deal would stand as they were proposed. I probably could have clawed another \$200 million out of the deal, but it would have come at the expense of Charles' emotional state. The agreement as it stood was good enough."

Was a CEO's emotional state really worth \$200 million to Huntsman? Believe it or not, this

wasn't the first time Huntsman gave away a fortune during a negotiation. Just four years earlier, in 1986, he made a verbal agreement with a CEO named Emerson Kampen. Huntsman would sell 40 percent of a division of his company to Kampen's for \$54 million. Due to legal delays, the contract wasn't written until six months later. By that time, Huntsman's profits had skyrocketed: that 40 percent of the division was now worth \$250 million. Kampen called with a matcher's offer to split the difference, proposing to pay \$152 million instead of the original \$54 million. Huntsman was poised to bring in nearly triple the original agreement. But he said no. The \$54 million was good enough. Kampen was incredulous: "That's not fair to you."

Huntsman believed in honoring his commitment to Kampen. Even though the lawyers hadn't drafted the original purchase agreement, he had shaken hands six months earlier on a verbal agreement. He signed for the \$54 million, walking away from an extra \$98 million. What type of businessman would make such irrational decisions?

In 1970, Huntsman started a chemical company that reigns today as the world's largest. He has been named Entrepreneur of the Year and earned more than a dozen honorary doctorates from universities around the world. He's a billionaire, one of the *Forbes* one thousand richest people in the world.

As his deal-making choices show, Huntsman is also a giver, and not just in business. Since 1985, he has been involved in serious philanthropy. He is one of just nineteen people in the world who have given at least \$1 billion away. Huntsman has won major humanitarian awards for giving more than \$350 million to found the world-class Huntsman Cancer Center, and made hefty donations to help earthquake victims in Armenia, support education, and fight domestic violence and homelessness. Of course, many rich people give away serious sums of money, but Huntsman demonstrates an uncommon intensity that sets him apart. In 2001, the chemical industry tanked, and he lost a sizable portion of his fortune. Most people would cut back on giving until they recovered. But Huntsman made an unconventional decision. He took out a personal loan, borrowing several million dollars to make good on his philanthropic commitments for the next three years.

Huntsman sounds like a classic example of someone who got rich and then decided to give back. But there's a different way of looking at Huntsman's success, one that might be impossible to believe if it weren't backed up by Huntsman's experience and by science. Maybe getting rich didn't turn him into a giver. What if we've mixed up cause and effect?

Huntsman believes that being a giver *actually made him rich*. In his giving pledge, Huntsman writes: "It has been clear to me since my earliest childhood memories that my reason for being was to help others. The desire to give back was the impetus for pursuing an education in business, for applying that education to founding what became a successful container company, and for using that experience to grow our differentiated chemicals corporation." As early as 1962, Huntsman told his wife that he "wanted to start his own business so he could make a difference" for people with cancer. Huntsman lost both of his parents to cancer, and had survived three bouts of cancer himself. Curing cancer is so deeply ingrained in Huntsman's fiber that he has even prioritized it above his political ideology. Although he worked in the Nixon White House and has been a longtime supporter of the Republican party, Huntsman has been known to favor Democratic candidates if they demonstrate a stronger commitment to curing cancer.

There's little doubt that Huntsman is a skilled businessman. But the very act of *giving money away* might have contributed to his fortune. In *Winners Never Cheat*, he writes, "Monetarily, the most

satisfying moments in my life have not been the excitement of closing a great deal or the reaping of profits from it. They have been when I was able to help others in need . . . There's no denying that I am a deal junkie, but I also have developed an addiction for giving. The more one gives, the better one feels; and the better one feels about it, the easier it becomes to give."

This is an extension of the idea that otherish givers build willpower muscles, making it easy to give more, but is it possible that Huntsman actually made money by giving it away? Remarkably, there's evidence to support this claim. The economist Arthur Brooks tested the relationship between [income and charitable giving](#). Using data from almost thirty thousand Americans in the year 2000, he controlled for every factor imaginable that would affect income and giving. He adjusted for education, age, race, religious involvement, political beliefs, and marital status. He also accounted for the number of times people volunteered. As expected, higher income led to higher giving. For every \$1 in extra income, charitable giving went up by \$0.14.*

But something much more interesting happened. For every \$1 in extra charitable giving, income was \$3.75 higher. Giving actually seemed to make people richer. For example, imagine that you and I are both earning \$60,000 a year. I give \$1,600 to charity; you give \$2,500 to charity. Although you gave away \$900 more than I did, according to the evidence, you'll be on track to earn \$3,375 more than I will in the coming year. Surprising as it seems, people who give more go on to earn more.

Jon Huntsman Sr. may be on to something. Research shows that giving can boost happiness and meaning, motivating people to work harder and earn more money, even if the gift isn't on the colossal scale of Huntsman's. In a study by psychologists Elizabeth Dunn, Lara Aknin, and Michael Norton, people rated their happiness in the morning. Then, they received a windfall: an envelope with \$20. They had to spend it by five P.M., and then they rated their happiness again. Would they be happier spending the money on themselves or on others?

Most people think they'd be happier spending the money on themselves, but the opposite is true. If you spend the money on yourself, your happiness doesn't change. But if you [spend the money on others](#), you actually report becoming significantly happier. This is otherish giving: you get to choose who you help, and it benefits you by improving your mood. Economists call it the [warm glow](#) of giving, and psychologists call it the helper's high. Recent [neuroscience evidence](#) shows that giving actually activates the reward and meaning centers in our brains, which send us pleasure and purpose signals when we act for the benefit of others.

These benefits are not limited to giving money; they also show up for giving time. One study of more than 2,800 [Americans over age twenty-four](#) showed that volunteering predicted increases in happiness, life satisfaction, and self-esteem—and decreases in depression—a year later. And for adults over sixty-five, those who volunteered saw a [drop in depression](#) over an eight-year period. Other studies show that elderly adults who volunteer or give support to others [actually live longer](#). This is true even after controlling for their health and the amount of support they get from others. In one experiment, adults either gave [massages](#) to babies or received massages themselves. Postmassage, those who gave had lower levels of stress hormones—such as cortisol and epinephrine—than those who received. It seems that giving adds meaning to our lives, distracts us from our own problems, and helps us feel valued by others. As researchers Roy Baumeister, Kathleen Vohs, Jennifer Aaker, and Emily Garbinsky conclude in a [national survey of Americans](#), "meaningfulness was associated with being a giver more than a taker."

There's a wealth of evidence that the ensuing [happiness can motivate people](#) to work harder,

longer, smarter, and more effectively. Happiness can lead people to experience intense effort and long hours as less unpleasant and more enjoyable, set more challenging goals, and think more quickly, flexibly, and broadly about problems. One study even showed that when physicians were put in a happier mood, they made [faster and more accurate diagnoses](#). Overall, on average, happier people earn more money, get higher performance ratings, make better decisions, negotiate sweeter deals, and contribute more to their organizations. Happiness alone accounts for about 10 percent of the variation between employees in job performance. By boosting happiness, giving might have motivated Jon Huntsman Sr. to work harder and smarter, helping him build up his fortune.

Huntsman is not the only influential businessperson who has come to view giving as a source of energy. In 2003, [Virgin mogul](#) Richard Branson set up a council called The Elders to fight conflict and promote peace, bringing together Nelson Mandela, Jimmy Carter, Kofi Annan, Desmond Tutu, and other leaders to alleviate suffering in Sudan, Cyprus, and Kenya. In 2004, Branson launched Virgin Unite, a nonprofit foundation that mobilizes people and resources to fight deadly diseases like AIDS and malaria, promote peace and justice, prevent climate change, and support entrepreneurs with microloans and new jobs in the developing world. In 2006, he pledged to donate all \$3 billion of the profits from the Virgin airline and train businesses over the next decade to fight global warming. In 2007, he offered a \$25 million prize for innovations to fight climate change. Was this string of events caused by a midlife crisis?

Actually, Branson was giving long before he became rich and famous. At age seventeen, a year after starting *Student* magazine and five full years before launching Virgin Records, Branson started his first charity. It was the Student Advisory Centre, a nonprofit organization that helped at-risk youth with a range of services. He made a list of problems that young people faced, from unwanted pregnancies to venereal disease, and convinced doctors to offer free or discounted services. He spent many nights on the phone at three A.M. consoling people who were contemplating suicide. Looking back, he notes that early in his career, he “had been interested in making money only to ensure *Student*’s continuing success and to fund the Student Advisory Centre.” Today, giving continues to energize him. The “thing that gets me up in the morning is the idea of making a difference,” Branson writes, “to help safeguard our future on this planet. Does that make me successful? It certainly makes me happy.”

These energizing effects help to explain why otherish givers are fortified against burnout: through giving, they build up reserves of happiness and meaning that takers and matchers are less able to access. Selfless givers use up these reserves, exhausting themselves and often dropping to the bottom of the success ladder. By giving in ways that are energizing rather than exhausting, otherish givers are more likely to rise to the top. In two studies of employees in a wide range of jobs and organizations, psychologist David Mayer and I found that otherish employees made [more sustainable contributions](#) than the selfless givers, takers, or matchers. Employees who reported strong concern for benefiting others and creating a positive image for themselves were rated by supervisors as being the most helpful and taking the most initiative.

Ironically, because concern for their own interests sustains their energy, otherish givers actually give more than selfless givers. This is what the late Herbert Simon, winner of the Nobel Prize in economics, observed in the quote that opened this chapter. Otherish givers may appear less altruistic than selfless givers, but their resilience against burnout enables them to contribute more.

7

Chump Change

Overcoming the Doormat Effect

No good deed goes unpunished.

—attributed to Clare Boothe Luce, editor, playwright, and U.S. congresswoman

[Lillian Bauer](#) was a brilliant, hardworking manager at an elite consulting firm. She was recruited out of Harvard, and after leaving the firm to complete her MBA, her consulting firm lured her back. She was widely seen as a rising star, and she was on track to make partner far ahead of schedule, until word began to spread that she was too generous. Her promotion to partner was delayed for six months, and she received very direct feedback that she needed to say no more often to clients and colleagues. After a full year, she still had not made it.

Bauer was passionate about making a difference. She devoted several years to a nonprofit organization helping women launch and grow businesses. There, she introduced a microloan program, opening doors for low-income women to start their own companies. In one case, a woman needed a loan to open a salon, but was turned down by two banks. Bauer worked with her to strengthen her business plan and financial statements, and both banks ended up offering her loans at highly competitive rates. As a consultant, Bauer spent countless hours mentoring new employees, giving career advice to associates, and even helping junior colleagues strengthen their applications to business school. “I really want to help. If an hour of my time saves people ten hours or gives them an opportunity they otherwise wouldn’t have, it’s easy to make the tradeoff and give another hour of my time.”

Bauer was extremely talented and driven, but she took giving so far that it was compromising her reputation and her productivity. “She never said no to anything,” explained one consulting colleague. “She was so generous and giving with her time that she fell into the trap of being more of a pushover. It really delayed her promotion to partner.” In a performance review, Bauer was told that she needed

to be more selfish: she lacked the assertive edge that was expected of a consulting partner. She spent too much time developing those around her, and she was so committed to helping clients that she bent over backward to meet their requests. It was known that Bauer “wasn’t as forceful in pushing clients as people felt she needed to be to make that partner hurdle, in those key moments where clients needed to hear a harsh message, or clients had been pushing an agenda in the wrong direction.” For Bauer, being a giver became a career-limiting move.

In a study that mirrors Bauer’s experience, management professors Diane Bergeron, Abbie Shipp, Ben Rosen, and Stacie Furst studied more than 3,600 [consultants in a large professional services firm](#). The researchers coded giving behavior from company records of the weekly time that each consultant spent helping new hires, mentoring more junior consultants, and sharing knowledge or expertise with peers. After a year of tracking these giving behaviors every week, the researchers obtained data on each consultant’s salary, advancement speed, and promotions.

The givers did worse on all three metrics. They had significantly lower salary increases, slower advancement, and lower promotion rates. The givers averaged 9 percent salary increases, compared with 10.5 percent and 11.5 percent for the takers and matchers, respectively. Less than 65 percent of the givers were promoted to a manager role, compared with 83 percent and 82 percent for the takers and matchers, respectively. And the givers who did get promoted had to wait longer, averaging twenty-six months to promotion, compared with less than twenty-four months for takers and matchers. This was a familiar pattern to Bauer: “If I err on one side, it’s probably being too generous: putting others first, before myself.”

Hundreds of miles east at Deloitte Consulting in New York City, Jason Geller was also on the fast track to partner. When he first started in consulting, Deloitte was just moving to e-mail and did not have a formalized knowledge management process—there was no system for storing and retrieving information that consultants gathered on specific industries and clients. Geller took the initiative to collect and share information. When he heard about a project, he would ask the team for its output. He kept a stack of articles on his nightstand, reading them in bed, and when he came across an interesting article, he would file it away. He conducted research on what Deloitte’s competitors were doing. “I was a little bit of a geek.”

Deloitte’s knowledge management system became Jason Geller’s brain, and his hard drive. His colleagues began calling it the J-Net, the Jason Network. When they had questions or needed information, he was the go-to guy. It was easier to ask him than to search for themselves, and he was always willing to share the knowledge from his brain or his growing database. No one asked him to create the J-Net; he just did it because it seemed like the right thing to do.

Since graduating from Cornell, Geller had spent his entire career at Deloitte, doing an MBA at Columbia along the way. He was grateful for the support that his mentors provided to him. A matcher would have paid it back, looking for ways to return the favor to his mentors. But as a giver, like Lillian Bauer, Geller wanted to pay it forward. “It becomes the natural way of doing things. You see that the folks who are successful are the ones who help others. I naturally fell into the practice of helping others. I saw that others created those opportunities for me, and I now work very hard to create them for other people.” Geller made a standing offer to every new employee: he would help and mentor them in any way that he could.

The typical path to partner at Deloitte takes between twelve and fifteen years. Geller made it far ahead of schedule, in just nine years. At just thirty years old, he became one of the youngest partners

in Deloitte history. Today, Geller is a partner in Deloitte's human capital consulting practice, where the business he leads globally and in the United States has been ranked number one in the marketplace. Yet a colleague describes him as a guy "who frequently shuns the spotlight in favor of his colleagues." As Deloitte's global and U.S. HR transformation practice leader, Geller has taken the J-Net to a new level and is a strong advocate for Deloitte's formal global knowledge management processes and technologies. With a mix of admiration and incredulity, one analyst notes that "although he is incredibly busy, he holds regular meetings with analysts so he can help them through any issues they may be facing at the time." Geller is reluctant to take credit for his accomplishments, but after some prodding, acknowledges that "being generous is what has made me successful here."

Although Lillian Bauer and Jason Geller are both givers, they found themselves on very different trajectories. Why did giving stall her career, while accelerating his?

The intuitive answer has to do with gender, but that's not the key differentiator—at least not in the conventional sense. Lillian Bauer fell into three major traps that plague many givers, male and female, in their dealings with other people: being too trusting, too empathetic, and too timid. In this chapter, my goal is to show you how successful givers like Jason Geller avoid these risks, and how givers like Lillian learn to overcome them by acting less selfless and more otherish. Becoming a doormat is the giver's worst nightmare, and I'll make the case that an otherish approach enables givers to escape the trap of being too trusting by becoming highly flexible and adaptable in their reciprocity styles. I'll also argue that an otherish style helps givers sidestep the land mines of being too empathetic and too timid by repurposing some skills that come naturally to them.

Sincerity Screening: Trusting Most of the People Most of the Time

In the opening chapter, we met an Australian financial adviser named Peter Audet, whose giver style paid off when he took a drive to visit a scrap metal client. But long before that, before he figured out how to be more otherish than selfless, Peter was ripped off by several takers. At twenty-two, he started his career as a financial adviser at a cutthroat company. It was his responsibility to aggressively build an insurance division for a business that primarily served retirement clients. Peter was working weekends to generate six-figure annual revenues, but received a tiny fraction of the revenues, taking home minimum wage of \$400 per week. He stayed for nearly three years, and it was the most miserable time of his life. “My boss was greedy. He never recognized what you did, only what he could get from you.” In appreciation of Peter’s services, one of his insurance clients sent him a beautiful Christmas basket. His boss, a wealthy man who drove to work in a Mercedes-Benz, saw the basket and immediately took it home for himself: “I’m the boss, and it’s mine.”

Peter felt like he was drowning, and decided to strike off on his own as a financial adviser. In his first year alone, he quadrupled his salary. But five years later, he was manipulated by another taker. A friendly colleague, Brad, was not doing well at work. Brad landed another position that would start the following week, and he asked Peter for a favor. Would he buy Brad’s clients on two days’ notice so that Brad could afford to leave? As a giver, Peter trusted Brad and agreed on the spot. He purchased Brad’s clients and began forging relationships with them, helping to solve their financial problems.

After a few months, Peter started to lose some of his clients. Strangely, they were all former clients of Brad’s. It turned out that Brad was back in the business as a financial adviser, and he had called every one of the clients who he had sold to Peter. He just wanted to let them know he was back, and they were welcome to switch over to work with him again. Brad stole many of the clients back without paying Peter a dime for them. Peter lost around \$10,000 in business.

Had Peter been able to identify Brad from the start as a taker, he might never have gone down that road. Trust is one reason that givers are so susceptible to the doormat effect: they tend to see the best in everyone, so they operate on the mistaken assumption that everyone is trustworthy. In one study, researchers tracked whether Americans had been [victims of crimes](#) such as fraud, con games, and identity theft. The givers were twice as likely to be victimized as the takers, often as a direct result of trusting takers. One giver was generous enough to cosign for a friend’s car loan, and over a five-year period, the friend opened three credit cards in his identity, stealing more than \$2,000.

To avoid getting scammed or exploited, it’s critical to distinguish the genuine givers from the takers and fakers. Successful givers need to know who’s likely to manipulate them so that they can protect themselves. Do we actually know takers when we see them? Many people think they can judge givers and takers in the blink of an eye. But in reality, they’re wildly inaccurate. Blink again.

I don’t mean to imply that we fail across the board in [thin slicing](#). As Malcolm Gladwell revealed in *Blink*, many of our snap judgments of people are strikingly accurate. At a glance, we can often spot a passionate teacher, an extraverted salesperson, or a married couple in contempt. But we struggle mightily when guessing who’s a genuine giver.

In one study, economists asked a group of Harvard students to predict the giving and taking behaviors of their [close friends](#) and of complete strangers. The friends and strangers received fifty

tokens worth between ten and thirty cents each, and were asked to divide the tokens between themselves and the Harvard students. The Harvard students did no better in predicting how much their friends would give than they did in predicting the behavior of complete strangers. “They correctly expect that friends pass more tokens than strangers,” the researchers write, “but they do not expect more tokens from generous friends compared to selfish friends.” This is a crucial mistake, because the giving friends end up contributing quite a bit more than the takers.

When we try to zero in on a person’s reciprocity signal, it’s easy to be thrown off by plenty of noise. To judge givers, we often rely on personality cues, but it turns out these cues can be misleading. In half a century of research, psychologists have discovered a fundamental personality trait that distinguishes how people tend to appear in their social interactions. It’s called [agreeableness](#), and it’s why Peter Audet was fooled by Brad. Like Brad, agreeable people tend to appear cooperative and polite—they seek harmony with others, coming across as warm, nice, and welcoming. Disagreeable people tend to be more competitive, critical, and tough—they’re more comfortable with conflict, coming across as skeptical and challenging.*

We tend to stereotype agreeable people as givers, and disagreeable people as takers. When a new contact appears affable, it’s natural to conclude that he has good intentions. If he comes across as cold or confrontational, this seems like a sign that he doesn’t care about what’s in our best interests.* But in making these judgments, we’re paying too much attention to the shell of a person’s demeanor, overlooking the pearl—or clam—inside the shell. Giving and taking are based on our motives and values, and they’re choices that we make [regardless of whether our personalities trend agreeable or disagreeable](#). As Danny Shader, the serial entrepreneur from the opening chapter who initially walked away from David Hornik’s term sheet, explains, “Whether you’re nice or not nice is separate from whether you’re self-focused or other-focused. They’re independent, not opposites.” When you combine outer appearances and inner intentions, agreeable givers and disagreeable takers are only two of the four combinations that exist in the world.

We often overlook that there are disagreeable givers: people who are rough and tough in demeanor, but ultimately generous with their time, expertise, and connections. As an example, Shader mentions the late [Mike Homer](#), who ran marketing at Netscape. “He could be crusty as hell on the outside, but on the inside he was pure gold. When push came to shove, he always did the right thing, and he was incredibly loyal.” Greg Sands, a Homer disciple and the managing director of a private equity firm, agrees. “Your fundamental concern is whether people are givers or takers, but you’ve got this other axis, which is are they nice about it—is their fundamental demeanor welcoming? Homer had a hard edge. When he was locked onto a path, something that got in the way of that objective would just get swept away. But he had a big heart, and he wanted to be helpful. He was definitely off the charts on both” giving and disagreeableness. Another one of Homer’s former employees said that Homer “seemed like a taker, because he had incredibly high expectations and demands. But at the end of the day, he really cared about the people. One minute, he was giving me a tough time because his expectations weren’t being met. The next day, he was helping me figure out what I wanted to do next in my career, what was the right next job for me.”

The other counterintuitive combination of appearances and motives is the agreeable taker, otherwise known as a faker. Like Ken Lay at Enron, these people come across as pleasant and charming, but they’re often aiming to get much more than they give. The ability to recognize agreeable takers as fakers is what protects givers against being exploited.

Although they don't always put their skills to good use, givers have an instinctive advantage in sincerity screening. Research suggests that in general, [givers are more accurate](#) judges of others than matchers and takers. Givers are more attentive to others' behaviors and more attuned to their thoughts and feelings, which makes it possible to pick up more clues—such as describing successes with first-person singular pronouns, like *I* and *me* instead of *us* and *we*. Givers also gain a sincerity screening advantage from habitually trusting others, which creates opportunities to see the wide range of behaviors of which other people are capable. Sometimes, givers get burned by takers. In other situations, givers find that their generosity is reciprocated or even exceeded. Over time, [givers become sensitive to individual differences](#) and shades of gray between the black-and-white boxes of agreeable and disagreeable.

But givers become doormats when they fail to use this fine-tuned knowledge of differences between veneers and motives. The inclination to give first and ask questions later often comes at the expense of sincerity screening. In consulting, Lillian Bauer made a habit of clearing her schedule for virtually anyone who asked, regardless of who they were. When a client asked for a supplementary analysis, even if it wasn't technically part of the project, she would do it, wanting to please the client. When a junior analyst needed advice, she would immediately open up time in her calendar, sacrificing her personal time.

At Deloitte, Jason Geller intuitively adopted an approach that closely resembles sincerity screening. Geller starts by offering help to every new hire, but in his initial conversations with them, he pays attention to who seems to be a giver versus a taker. “I can't proactively go and spend time with every single person in the practice globally, so I try to sense who's genuine and who's not. Some folks approach the conversation in terms of learning. Others come in and say, ‘I want to get promoted to senior consultant. What should I do?’” Geller assumes these consultants are takers. “They focus on telling me what they're doing, with a thirty-minute agenda of things they want to update me on, because they want to make me aware. They're not really asking insightful questions; it's very superficial. We don't get deep enough for it to be really helpful for them.”

Over time, as she sacrificed her own interests, Lillian Bauer began to recognize that some people operated like takers: “they're so self-focused that they will take what they can and move on, so I started being more systematic in how I helped other people.” She started to pay more attention to who was asking and how they treated her, and made a list of reasons to say no. To continue giving but do so more efficiently, she wrote advice guides for engagement managers and associate partners, putting much of her knowledge on paper so she didn't end up repeating it to takers. “I found that was a more strategic way of being a giver,” Bauer says.*

Once givers start to use their skills in sincerity screening to identify potential takers, they know when to put up their guard. But sometimes, this awareness sets in too late: givers have already become loyal to a taker. If givers are already trapped in exchanges where they feel concerned for a taker's interests, how do they protect themselves against the doormat effect?

Generous Tit for Tat: The Adaptable Giver

Several years after Brad stole his clients and his money, Peter Audet was working with a business partner named Rich. When they first paired up, Rich came across as highly agreeable: he was enthusiastic and friendly. But a colleague reflects that “although Rich looked like a giver because he acted supportive, he was really a taker. Peter was a giver, and Rich was sucking everything out of him.” Rich was drawing a high salary, more than \$300,000 a year, without contributing much to the financial success of the business. He was living on the Gold Coast of Australia, and he would spend his mornings on the beach, stroll into the office at ten A.M., and go to the pub at midday. “Brad gave me a pretty strong sense of what a taker looked like, and I realized that Rich was a big taker,” Peter laments. “I was always doing extra work, and Rich was absolutely draining the business of money. He didn’t really care about the staff or service to clients; he was starting to pollute the culture. He was taking advantage of me, trading off the back of my loyalty to him because we had built the business up from nothing.”

Peter stayed timid until one Monday, when Rich announced that he had bought a multimillion-dollar house on the Gold Coast. He needed \$100,000, and he took it right out of the company account. At a board meeting that day, Rich left early to meet friends at the pub. This was the last straw for Peter; he knew Rich could no longer be trusted, so he promised the board that he would hold Rich accountable. But he had yet to formulate a plan—and he felt guilty and uncomfortable: “Rich was like my big brother.” A colleague said, “It would have been hard for anybody, but I think it was harder because Peter is a giver. He knew what was at the other side of it for Rich, and he wanted to save him from it.”

Peter was a victim of empathy, the powerful emotion that we experience when we imagine another person’s distress. Empathy is a pervasive force behind giving behaviors, but it’s also a major source of vulnerability. When Brad wasn’t doing well and accepted a new job, Peter felt his pain, and bought his clients without hesitation. When he considered how Rich would feel about being ousted, Peter felt sorry for him, and didn’t want to cut him out.

Peter was falling into an empathy trap that’s visible in a classic negotiation study. Researchers brought people together in pairs to negotiate the purchase of electronics products such as TVs. [Half of the negotiating pairs were strangers; the other half were dating couples](#). In each pair, one negotiator was the seller, and the other was the buyer. On average, who do you think would achieve more joint profits: the strangers or the dating couples?

I assumed that the dating couples would do better, because they would trust each other more, share more information, and discover opportunities for mutual gains.

But the dating couples did substantially *worse* than the strangers, achieving lower joint profits.

Before the negotiation, the researchers asked the dating couples how in love they were. The stronger their feelings of love, the worse they did.

The dating couples—especially the ones in love—operated like selfless givers. Their default approach was to empathize with their partners’ needs and give in right away, regardless of their own interests. Concern for their partners had the effect of “short-circuiting efforts to discover integrative solutions in favor of more accessible but less mutually satisfactory outcomes,” the researchers write, leading to a “‘kid gloves’ approach to problem solving.” When researchers studied selfless givers at

the bargaining table, the same pattern surfaced. People who agreed with statements like “I always place the needs of others above my own” were anxious about putting strain on the relationship, so they accommodated their counterparts by giving away value.

As with the dating couples in love, empathy had turned Peter into a doormat—until he discovered an alternative to empathy that’s equally aligned with his natural strengths as a giver. Instead of contemplating Rich’s feelings, Peter considered what Rich was thinking. This led to a powerful insight: Rich seemed interested in working on a new challenge, so Peter could [appeal to Rich’s self-interest](#). “You’re clearly not enjoying running the business day-to-day,” Peter told Rich, “so why don’t you let me handle it? I think I’m old enough now that I’m ready for the heavy lifting.” Rich agreed, expressing a desire to work on special projects in the entrepreneurial space to generate new revenue for the business. Peter supported the decision and started running board meetings.

Peter accomplished this maneuver by getting inside Rich’s head, rather than his heart. Studies led by Columbia psychologist Adam Galinsky show that when we [empathize at the bargaining table](#), focusing on our counterparts’ emotions and feelings puts us at risk of giving away too much. But when we engage in perspective taking, considering our counterparts’ thoughts and interests, we’re more likely to find ways to make deals that satisfy our counterparts without sacrificing our own interests. Peter never would have discovered his solution if he had continued to empathize with Rich. By shifting his focus from Rich’s feelings to his thoughts, Peter was able to see the world through a taker’s eyes and adjust his strategy accordingly.

Despite his success in drawing Rich into a role where he could do less harm, Peter couldn’t quite let go of the desire to support Rich and help him succeed. At the same time, he knew there was still plenty of room for Rich to keep taking. Peter decided to trust but verify: he granted Rich the autonomy to work on special projects, but held him accountable for his results, asking him to report on his progress every ninety days. “I gave him the opportunity to measure his own contribution and for us to do the same.” After six months, Rich had done very little. Peter conducted a formal analysis and wrote a board report. “When Rich’s contribution ended up being zero, it was undeniably of his own doing. He was presented with a crude form of evidence of his own taking and lack of giving. The truth ultimately moved him on and set him free for me.” Rich elected to leave and take his equity out of the business.

Peter was no longer a doormat; he had taken down a taker. Later, he learned that Rich had been even more of a taker than anyone realized: he had a large line of credit with the firm, and also owed the bank money. Peter had to write a check to settle because Rich was short. A year after Peter took over as managing director, Rich exited the firm. Fifteen months after Rich’s departure, Peter’s firm had turned around to achieve seven-figure profits, staff morale had skyrocketed, turnover had plummeted, and they were in the running for firm of the year in the dealer group.

Once successful givers see the value of sincerity screening and begin to spot agreeable takers as potential fakers, they protect themselves by adjusting their behavior accordingly. Peter’s experience offers a clue into how givers avoid getting burned: they become matchers in their exchanges with takers. It’s wise to start out as a giver, since research shows that trust is hard to build but easy to destroy. But once a counterpart is clearly acting like a taker, it makes sense for givers to flex their reciprocity styles and shift to a matching strategy—as Peter did by requiring Rich to reciprocate by adding value to the business. “It’s built into my nature now to not give takers much time, and certainly not waste my time with them,” Peter says.

In one experiment, psychologists gave people the chance to work with partners who were either competitive or cooperative. The takers acted competitively regardless of who their partners were. The rest adapted to their partners; they were [cooperative when working with cooperative partners](#), but once a partner was competitive, they matched their behavior, responding in a more competitive manner. Game theorists call this *tit for tat*, and it's a pure matcher strategy: start out cooperating, and stay cooperative unless your counterpart competes. When your counterpart competes, match the behavior by competing too. This is a wildly effective form of matching that has won many game theory tournaments. But tit for tat suffers from "a fatal flaw," writes Harvard mathematical biologist Martin Nowak, of "not being forgiving enough to stomach the occasional mishap."

Nowak has found that it can be more advantageous to alternate between giving and matching. In *generous tit for tat*, the rule is "never forget a good turn, but occasionally forgive a bad one." You start out cooperating and continue cooperating until your counterpart competes. When your counterpart competes, instead of always responding competitively, generous tit for tat usually means competing two thirds of the time, acting cooperatively in response to one of every three defections. "Generous tit for tat can easily wipe out tit for tat and defend itself against being exploited by defectors," Nowak writes. Generous tit for tat achieves a powerful balance of rewarding giving and discouraging taking, without being overly punitive. It comes with a risk: generous tit for tat encourages most people to act like givers, which opens the door for takers to "rise up again" by competing when everyone else is cooperating. But in a world where relationships and reputations are visible, it's increasingly difficult for takers to take advantage of givers. According to Nowak, "The generous strategy dominates for a very long time."

Generous tit for tat is an otherish strategy. Whereas selfless givers make the mistake of trusting others all the time, otherish givers start out with trust as the default assumption, but they're willing to adjust their reciprocity styles in exchanges with someone who appears to be a taker by action or reputation. Being otherish means that givers keep their own interests in the rearview mirror, taking care to trust but verify. When dealing with takers, shifting into matcher mode is a self-protective strategy. But one out of every three times, it may be wise to shift back into giver mode, granting so-called takers the opportunity to redeem themselves. This is what Peter Audet did with Rich by offering him the chance to earn his keep. Otherish givers carry the [optimistic belief](#) that Randy Pausch expressed in *The Last Lecture*: "Wait long enough, and people will surprise and impress you."

The value of generous tit for tat as an otherish approach was demonstrated by [Abraham Lincoln](#) in the Sampson story from the opening chapter. After Lincoln fell on his sword so that Lyman Trumbull could defeat James Shields in the Illinois Senate race, Trumbull came under fire for trying to sabotage Lincoln's career. Lincoln's wife, Mary Todd, said Trumbull had committed "selfish treachery" and she cut ties with Trumbull's wife, who had been one of her closest friends—Mary was a bridesmaid at the Trumbull wedding. Lincoln, however, was more inclined to forgive. He expressed faith to Trumbull: "Any effort to put enmity between you and me is as idle as the wind." At the same time, wanting to protect himself against defection, Lincoln warned Trumbull not to cross him: "While I have no more suspicion against you than I have of my best friend living, I am kept in a constant struggle against suggestions of this sort." Trumbull reciprocated, helping Lincoln in his next Senate bid.

In 1859, Chicago mayor John Wentworth accused Norman Judd of plotting against Lincoln to support Trumbull and advance his own political career. Whereas his wife never forgave Judd,

Lincoln reminded Judd that “you did vote for Trumbull against me” but interpreted Judd’s decision generously: “I think, and have said a thousand times, that was no injustice to me.” Lincoln helped Judd mediate the conflict with Wentworth, but then asked for reciprocity: “it would hurt some for me to not get the Illinois delegation,” Lincoln wrote. “Can you not help me a little in this matter, in your end of the vineyard?” Judd matched: he landed a major editorial supporting Lincoln in the *Chicago Tribune* the following week, secured the Republican Convention in Chicago where Lincoln had supporters, and made sure that Lincoln’s detractors were seated in the back, limiting their influence. Although Lincoln’s default was in line with a giver style, he recognized the value of occasional matching, and benefited from generous tit for tat. Lincoln’s acute attention to others’ perspectives gave him “the power to forecast with uncanny accuracy what his opponents were likely to do,” explained his secretary’s daughter, and use this forecast to “checkmate them.”

Since Jason Geller first started mentoring new hires at Deloitte, he has adopted a version of generous tit for tat. At the end of the first meeting with a new hire, Geller makes an offer: “If this conversation was helpful, I’m happy to do it on a monthly basis.” If the person agrees, Geller sets up a recurring monthly meeting in his calendar, with no end date. In addition to creating opportunities for Geller to give, the monthly meetings offer the side benefit of helping him understand who might be a taker. “Part of the value of the ongoing dialogue is you can tell pretty quickly who’s faking it, because the good conversations and relationships build upon each other,” Geller explains. “It’s easy to fake it every six months, but not on a regular basis. That’s part of why I encourage people to schedule that time. It’s part of how you sort out who’s genuine while making the biggest impact.” Once Geller identifies a colleague as a taker, he keeps giving, but becomes more cautious in his approach. “I don’t help them less, but the help starts to look different. I’ll listen and engage, but we’re not having a dialogue; there’s not as much mentoring and coaching. It’s not that I will consciously be less available to support them, but human nature leads you to invest your time where there is the biggest return—for both of us.”

Initially, Lillian Bauer didn’t vary her investment as a function of the requester’s reciprocity style. Before she began sincerity screening, she was generous with every audience. That changed after she helped a family friend who sought her advice about landing a position at a top-tier consulting firm. Bauer responded in a characteristically generous fashion: she spent more than fifty hours coaching the candidate on nights and weekends and made connections for her at her own firm and several competing firms. The candidate ended up receiving offers from Bauer’s firm and a competitor, and joined Bauer’s firm. But then, despite the fact that Bauer and her colleagues had expended a great deal of time and energy recruiting her, the candidate requested a transfer to another office in a different country—in direct violation of the firm’s recruiting guidelines. Bauer had been duped by an agreeable taker: “The discussions were very much around what was best for her and her only. The way she was talking about the decision made it clear this was all about her; she was obviously going to help herself.” Having been taken advantage of, Bauer learned to be more cautious in dealing with takers. “After that point, it just completely changed the way I felt about her, and I wasn’t willing to be as generous.”

Through a combination of sincerity screening and generous tit for tat, Bauer was able to avoid becoming a doormat in advising and mentoring takers. But she hadn’t overcome the obstacle of learning to challenge clients and say no to some of their requests, instead of being a pushover. “I was still saying yes to the client too much, instead of pushing back.” What does it take for givers to

become more assertive?

Assertiveness and the Advocacy Paradox

The men and women were equally qualified, but the [men were earning substantially more money](#). Linda Babcock, an economist at Carnegie Mellon University, stared at the data in dismay. Although it was the twenty-first century, the male MBA graduates from her school had 7.6 percent higher salaries than their female counterparts. Carnegie Mellon is one of the world's finest technical institutions, boasting eighteen Nobel Prize winners, including seven in economics alone. When business students enroll for their MBAs at Carnegie Mellon, they are signing up for a serious quantitative challenge. The school offers degrees in computational finance, quantitative economics, and software engineering, and over 40 percent of all Carnegie Mellon MBAs accept jobs in finance. In such a quantitatively intense environment, the salary numbers suggested that women still face a glass ceiling. Babcock calculated that over a thirty-five-year career, this gap meant that each woman was losing an average of more than \$1 million.

But the gender gap, it turns out, wasn't quite due to a glass ceiling. Men and women received similar starting offers, and the discrepancy emerged by the time they signed their final offers. Upon closer inspection, Babcock discovered a dramatic difference between men and women in the willingness to ask for more money. More than half of the men—57 percent—tried to negotiate their starting salaries, compared with only 7 percent of the women. The men were more than eight times as likely to negotiate as the women. The students who did negotiate (mostly men) improved their salaries by an average of 7.4 percent, enough to account for the gender gap.

The discrepancy in willingness to negotiate wasn't limited to the quantitative world of Carnegie Mellon MBAs. In another study, Babcock and her colleagues recruited people to play four rounds of Boggle for a fee of somewhere between \$3 and \$10. When they finished, the researcher acted like a taker, handing them the minimum of \$3 and asking, "Is three dollars okay?" Once again, eight times as many men as women asked for more money. The next study went the same way, but the researcher handed them the minimum of \$3 without asking if it was okay. None of the women asked for more money, whereas 13 percent of the men took the initiative to ask for more. With another group of participants, the researcher handed over \$3 and said, "The exact payment is negotiable." The majority of the men (59 percent) seized the opportunity and asked for more, compared with only 17 percent of the women. Overall, the men were 8.3 times more likely to ask for more money than the women. In each case, the women were doormats, allowing takers to walk all over them. Research shows that one of the main reasons that women tend to negotiate less assertively than men is that they worry about violating social expectations that they'll be warm and kind.*

Yet women aren't the only ones who become pushovers at the bargaining table. The doormat effect is a curse that afflicts givers of both genders. In several experiments, male and female givers were willing to make [large concessions](#) just to reach an agreement that would make their counterparts happy, even if they had better options available. And in a series of studies led by Notre Dame professor Timothy Judge, nearly four thousand Americans filled out a survey on whether they were givers, indicating the degree to which they tended to be helpful, caring, and trusting. On average, the givers earned 14 percent lower income than their less giving counterparts, taking an annual pay hit of nearly \$7,000. When the data were split by gender, the [income penalty](#) was three times greater for giver men than giver women. The female givers earned an average of 5.47 percent less money than

their peers, for a difference of \$1,828. The male givers earned an average of 18.31 percent less money than their peers, for a difference of \$9,772.

As we saw earlier in the chapter on powerless communication, givers tend to be humble and uncomfortable asserting themselves directly. [Studies in more controlled settings](#) have shown that in zero-sum situations, givers frequently shy away from advocating for their own interests: when negotiating their salaries, they make more modest requests than matchers and takers, and end up accepting less favorable outcomes. This reluctance to be assertive is especially likely to afflict agreeable givers, who pay a price in their pocketbooks.*

At a professional services firm, a man who I'll call [Sameer Jain](#) was a giver who consistently fell victim to the doormat effect. Sameer was ranked at the top of his class and the top 10 percent of all employees in the northeast United States at his firm, and dedicated much of his time to helping colleagues and mentoring junior employees. Despite being a star performer, he watched his friends at other firms get promoted faster and earn more income, and he never negotiated his salary or asked for a raise. On several occasions, he watched assertive peers who were no better performers negotiate raises and promotions, sailing past him in the corporate hierarchy. "I did not push hard enough to make that happen for myself. I didn't want to make others uncomfortable or overstep my bounds."

Growing up in India, Sameer was a pushover, which made him the butt of jokes in his family. His father came from a background in poverty, and learned to be a hard-nosed negotiator who bargained for everything, clawing his family up to the middle class. Sameer grew up shielded, protected from having to assert himself. His submissiveness bothered his wife, who was a tough negotiator. When they first started dating, Sameer was about to sign a lease on an apartment. His wife intervened, negotiated on his behalf, and reduced the rent by \$600 a year. He was impressed, but also embarrassed. Since then, whenever they make a purchase, he has turned to his wife to negotiate, knowing that he would be a doormat. "To be honest, I've been ashamed of this for a long time," he admits.

After he left the professional services firm, Sameer completed an MBA and received a job offer from a *Fortune* 500 medical technology company, his ideal employer. He wasn't entirely satisfied with the terms of the offer, but as usual, he was reluctant to negotiate. "I felt awkward. I like my boss, and I didn't want to make him uncomfortable." Weakening Sameer's position further, the economy had just crashed, and his peers were all signing without negotiating.

But something was different this time. By a couple months later, Sameer had negotiated increases in his total compensation to the tune of more than \$70,000. He had undergone a chump change, transforming from his traditional doormat status into a more assertive, more successful negotiator. "My wife was stunned, and she complimented my persistence and effectiveness as a negotiator," he says. "For her to see me as a good negotiator is the ultimate validation." What was it that drove Sameer to step up to the plate?

The answer can be found in an ingenious experiment conducted by Linda Babcock and her colleagues. The participants were [176 senior executives](#) from private and public organizations, with titles ranging from CEO and COO to president, general manager, and chairman. The executives all started with the same information: an employee in a software company was being promoted, and they were negotiating compensation for the new position. The male executives playing the role of the employee landed an average of \$146,000, 3 percent higher than the women's average of \$141,000. But with a single sentence, Babcock and colleagues helped the female executives boost their averages

to \$167,000, outdoing the men by 14 percent.

All it took was to tell them they were playing a different role. Instead of imagining that they were the employee, the female executives were asked to imagine that they were the employee's mentor. Now the women were agents advocating for someone else. Interestingly, they didn't set higher goals, but they were willing to push harder to achieve their goals, which led them to better outcomes. In a similar study, researchers Emily Amanatullah and Michael Morris asked men and women to negotiate the terms of an attractive job offer. Half were instructed to imagine that they had received the offer themselves and negotiate accordingly. The other half were instructed to imagine that they had referred a friend for the job and were now responsible for negotiating on behalf of the friend. Once again, all of the participants set similar goals, irrespective of whether they were male or female, or negotiating for themselves or a friend.

But their actual behavior in the negotiations varied strikingly. Regardless of whether they were negotiating for themselves or others, the men requested starting salaries averaging \$49,000. The women followed a different path. When they were negotiating for themselves, they requested starting salaries averaging only \$42,000—16.7 percent lower than the men.

This discrepancy vanished when the women [negotiated on behalf of a friend](#). As advocates, women did just as well as the men, requesting an average of \$49,000. In another study, Amanatullah and Morris found the same results with experienced executives negotiating: male executives landed the same salaries regardless of whether they were negotiating for themselves or others, whereas female executives did much better when negotiating for others than themselves. And Vanderbilt professors Bruce Barry and Ray Friedman found that in short-term, single-issue negotiations, givers do worse than takers, because they're willing to give larger slices of the pie to their counterparts. But this disadvantage disappears entirely when the givers set high goals and stick to them—which is easier for givers to do when advocating for someone else.

Advocating for others was the key to Sameer's chump change. When he shied away from negotiating with his initial employer, Sameer was thinking about his own interests. With the *Fortune* 500 medical technology company, he put himself in a different frame of mind: he was representing his family's interests. Although he might be a doormat when he was responsible for himself, being a giver meant that he didn't want to let other people down. "I used it as a psychological weapon against myself, to motivate myself," Sameer says. "The solution was thinking about myself as an agent, an advocate for my family. As a giver, I feel guilty about pushing too much, but the minute I start thinking, 'I'm hurting my family, who's depending on me for this,' I don't feel guilty about pushing for that side."

By thinking of himself as an agent representing his family, Sameer summoned the resolve to make an initial request for a higher salary and tuition reimbursement. This was an otherish strategy. On the one hand, he was doing what givers do naturally: advocating for other people's interests. On the other hand, he intentionally advocated for his family, whose interests were closely aligned with his own. At the same time, he wasn't pushing so far as to become a taker: he sought a balance in meeting his family's interests and his company's. "My value system means that I'm not going to do anything that's wrong or unfair," Sameer explains. "I'm not going to try to gouge anyone, but I am going to push to the point that's right and fair."

When Sameer first contacted his new boss to negotiate, he asked for a salary increase and reimbursement of his MBA tuition. This matched what other firms were offering, but the boss came

back with disappointing news from HR: they weren't able to grant either request. At that point, Sameer felt the urge to back down. He wanted to be a giver toward his boss, and he was worried that getting more money would harm his boss's performance or compromise his budget. But Sameer had massive debt from student loans, and he felt responsible for his family first. He asked again, convincing his boss to lobby HR for the bump in his salary and signing bonus. He ended up getting a \$5,000 salary increase and a \$5,000 signing bonus increase. By that time, his \$10,000 signing bonus had expired. Sameer asked for that too, and got it. His boss assured him that this was the best he could do.

Sameer was already up \$20,000 in the first year alone, not to mention the dividends that the base salary increase would accrue, but he wasn't done yet. He still wasn't receiving tuition reimbursement, so he was determined to find another way to support his family. He had plenty of free time during his last semester of school, so he negotiated a consulting arrangement to work for the company part-time. The company agreed to pay him \$135 per hour, which would net Sameer another \$50,000 in the span of a few months. At that point, he signed the contract, having upped his total compensation by more than \$70,000. "Being able to keep pushing, a large part of that was being an agent," Sameer says. "If I don't push now, what's going to happen when I get another promotion? I'm going to be that guy who has three kids and gets pushed around. Thinking of myself as an agent motivated me to keep going. It gave me some extra cojones."

Although advocating for his family helped him succeed, Sameer was still concerned about how it would affect his reputation at the firm and his relationship with his boss. When the negotiation was finished, his boss shared a surprising sentiment: he admired Sameer's assertiveness. "It was part of why my boss wanted me," Sameer says. "He respected that I wasn't going to be pushed around anymore." Givers, particularly agreeable ones, often overestimate the degree to which assertiveness might be off-putting to others. But Sameer didn't just earn respect by virtue of negotiating; his boss was impressed with how he negotiated. When HR initially rejected Sameer's request, he explained his family's circumstances. "I don't just have to worry about paying rent now. I have a family to support and loans to repay. Can you make this more palatable for me?" By asking on behalf of his family, instead of himself, Sameer was maintaining an image as a giver. He showed that he was willing to advocate for others, which sent a positive signal about how hard he would work when representing the company's interests.

Babcock and colleagues call this a [*relational account*](#)—an explanation for a request that highlights concern for the interests of others, not only oneself. When women ask for a higher salary, they run the risk of violating expectations that they will be "other-oriented and caring, giving rather than taking in character," Babcock writes with Hannah Riley Bowles. Whereas women may be uniquely worried that assertiveness will violate gender norms, givers of both sexes worry about violating their own reciprocity preferences. If they push too hard, they'll feel like takers, rather than givers. But when givers are advocating for someone else, pushing is closely aligned with their values of protecting and promoting the interests of others: givers can chalk it up to caring. And by offering relational accounts, givers do more than just think of themselves as agents advocating for others; they present themselves as agents advocating for others, which is a powerful way to maintain their self-images and social images as givers.

This reasoning proved relevant to Lillian Bauer when she decided to stop letting clients treat her like a doormat. "I want to be generous, and I build trust with clients, but that doesn't mean they can

walk all over me,” Bauer notes. To decline requests from clients that fell outside the scope of a project, she used a combination of advocacy and relational accounts. Starting with advocacy, Bauer began to think about herself as an agent for the consultants on her team. “Givers have a protective side. In negotiating with a client, I feel a lot of responsibility for my team, and it makes me more willing to draw a hard line.” Then, she developed a habit of articulating this responsibility to her clients: “When a client makes an unreasonable request, I explain that it’s going to stretch my team, or kill them working crazy hours. The client knows I will bend over backward to do what’s right for them, so when I do push back, it has a lot more impact: there’s a good reason for it.”

Pushing Past Pushover

Lillian's progress struck a chord with me. As a freshman in college, I accepted a job selling advertisements for the Let's Go travel guides. Written and produced entirely by Harvard students, the Let's Go guides were billed as the bible of the budget traveler, rivaling Lonely Planet, Frommer's, and Rick Steves' as the go-to resource for getting around a foreign country on the cheap. On my first day, my manager handed me a list of clients and said, "These people spent about \$300,000 last year on ads in the Let's Go books. Just call them up and convince them to advertise again." Then she turned around and walked away.

As I realized that I wouldn't get any training, I began to panic. I had no product knowledge and no relevant experience, and I had never left North America. I was only eighteen years old, and I had no business making sales pitches to senior vice presidents at major international companies.*

I mustered up the courage to call one of Let's Go's longtime advertisers, a man named Steven who ran a travel agency. The moment he started talking, it was clear he was furious. "At first, I was glad to see that my agency was written up in the books, separate from my ad," he snarled, "until I saw that outdated contact information was listed. So your readers can reach me, I've had to pay hundreds of dollars to maintain old postal addresses and e-mail accounts." I gently explained that advertising and editorial are separate departments; I could ensure the accuracy of his ads, but I had no influence over the content of the books themselves. Steven didn't care; he demanded an advertising discount to make up for the editorial error and threatened not to renew his ad if I didn't comply. Feeling bad for him, I granted him a 10 percent discount. This violated a Let's Go policy that appeared in my contract, prohibiting all discounts that didn't appear in our media kit, and it was a preview of more mistakes to come.

After contacting several dozen clients, I had given three more discounts and signed very few contracts, which became mortifying when I learned that Let's Go had a 95 percent client renewal rate. Along with bringing in no revenue, when a client demanded a refund on the previous year's ad, I caved, becoming the first employee to give away money that was already on the books. In empathizing with clients and trying to meet their needs in any way possible, I was helping them at my own expense—not to mention my company's. I was a disaster, and I was ready to quit.

It wasn't the first time I had been a giver to a fault. When I was fourteen, I decided to become a springboard diver. I was determined to master the art of hurling myself into the air, doing somersaults and twists, and entering the water gracefully without a splash. Never mind that I could hardly jump, flip, or twist, I was terrified to try new dives, and my teammates called out my lack of flexibility by nicknaming me Frankenstein. One day, my coach brought a metronome to practice in the hopes of improving my timing. After several hours of effort, he declared me incapable of rhythm.

For the next four years, I trained six hours a day. Eventually, I became a two-time state finalist, a two-time junior Olympic national qualifier, and an All-American diver. I would go on to compete at the NCAA varsity level at Harvard. But along the way, I sacrificed my own success. Several months before the biggest meet of my life, I volunteered to coach two of my competitors. I taught them new dives, critiqued their form, and revealed the secret of the rip entry, showing them how to disappear into the water at the end of a dive.

They returned the favor by beating me at the state championships, by just a handful of points.