

Take, Match, or Give

Leaving the ivory tower, let's enter the dog-eat-dog world of commerce. How does our level of compassion in relationships impact our work performance? Psychologist Adam Grant classifies people into three different groups according to the way they manage relationships—takers, matchers, and givers.^{1,2}

TAKERS	MATCHERS	GIVERS
Takers put their interests ahead of others. They are brilliant at smiling up and kicking down.	Matchers work tit for tat. If you give, then I give. If you take, then I take.	Givers help others without condition. They ask, "How can I contribute?"

According to Grant's research, most people are matchers, while givers and takers represent the other ends of the spectrum. In fact, matchers play an important role in keeping things balanced by rewarding givers and sticking it to takers.

Of the three groups, Grant found the worst performers were the givers. But this isn't to say taking is the best road to success—once matchers figure out the taker is putting others last, the game is up, and matchers will plot to bring down the taker. So although taking might be a good short-term strategy, it's only effective if you hit the road before the matchers catch on.

Who are the best performers? Surprisingly, the givers. That is, givers who aren't doormats. In order to be successful, givers need to get their job done and not just spend their time helping others. Givers need to stick to five-minute favors—make introductions, offer advice, and then get back to work. When successful givers help others, they learn to deliver compassion in big chunks. Research shows that you receive a bigger psychological boost when you concentrate compassion, which gives you plenty of time to get stuff done. And when it comes to dealing with a taker, givers need to become more like matchers—giving tit for tat and nothing more.

When it comes to team performance, what's better - hiring givers or firing takers? Research reveals that performance actually improves more by replacing a toxic teammate with an average teammate than by replacing an average teammate with a superstar. A single toxic teammate is poisonous, spreading their ill will to others and affecting performance for the worse. Sadly, the multiplier effect of taking is greater than that of giving.³



In the best-case scenario, you wouldn't hire the toxic teammate in the first place. But if you have a taker on your team, there's still hope. Taming a toxic teammate is possible using these three strategies to mitigate their effects:

- 1. Curiosity**—Strive to understand what might be going on in this person's life that would explain their toxic behavior. That isn't to say the taking is justified, but understanding your teammate will help you deal with them more compassionately.
- 2. Intent versus impact**—At times it is necessary to confront a toxic teammate. However, an attack on character will rarely if ever go well. Discussing the impact of their behavior on others is a more effective way to encourage change for the better.
- 3. Means versus ends**—Often when there's an argument, the issue is agreeing on how something will be achieved, not the desired results. To reach an agreement that will suit everyone, start with what unites people—a common goal. Then discuss a range of options to reach it.

And, if after all these steps are taken, the taker is still causing problems for your team, it's time to ask yourself a couple of questions. First, what impact will the taker's behavior have on your customers, patients, or students? Secondly, what impact will the taker's

behavior have on your teammates? After you have done all a reasonable person can do and the taker continues to hurt your team or who you serve, then expectations are simply not aligned. Now it's appropriate to say, "It's okay, you don't need to meet our expectations, but this job isn't for you."

Let's end by understanding the impact of caring for others on engagement. Highly engaged teams are led by people who think less about themselves and more about others. Highly engaged teams are led by people who advocate for the team's development and success. Highly engaged teams are led by people who reframe their jobs to foster engagement, satisfaction, and resilience. Under such leadership, employees and teammates feel like they belong, matter and can make a difference, which consequently increases commitment to the leader, to the team, and to the organization.

When it comes to compassion, it isn't all or nothing. Everyone is capable of great care as well as remarkable callousness. At its best, compassion means you enjoy giving and helping others, even those who are acquaintances or strangers. The best among us are as concerned for others as they are about themselves. Compassion is the capacity to give and receive love, friendship, and empathy, and it's something we are all capable of demonstrating in greater amounts.

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1. Grant, A. (2013, April). "In the Company of Givers and Takers." *Harvard Business Review*.
 2. Grant, A. (2017). "Are you a giver or a taker?" TED Talk, January 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YyXRYgjQXX0>.
 3. Houseman, M., & Minor, D. (2015, October). "Toxic Workers." *Harvard Business Review*.

