

Preferential Helping (Give More Help to People Who Help More, and Withhold Power from Those Not Ready For It)

Are you interested in having a greater impact on the world?

The choices

Assuming that you want to help others and make the world a better place, there is a choice: The choice is between giving everyone equal help, and giving more help to those people who will help others. With the first alternative, your help is sometimes wasted and sometimes furthers the cause of destructive people. In the second case, your help is multiplied.

Valuing the choice

In life you only have a limited amount of time to help people. For the sake of argument, let's say that you know how to teach assertiveness. If you teach anyone who comes along, a few might forget it before they apply it. A few might use the assertiveness privately on the people around them, for their selfish ends. And some might be unprincipled people who harm many others. Hitler would be an extreme example. Self-interested businessmen or politicians would be other examples. Therefore, if you teach average people, they might sometimes help others, and sometimes hurt them. But if you teach people who help others for a living or have made a conscious commitment to care for others, then your help will go further.

A story earlier in the book, *The Joy of Really Knowing That You Helped*, can give you a taste of what can happen if you're not careful about who you help and how you help. [Elizabeth, this is on the website's stories page.] In the story, John Thorowgood empowers people who later on use the power to oppress others.

While the story contains many lessons, there are two techniques that would have made the most difference to the people whose lives John destroyed through his help. One

is to help through friendship, using the Make A Friend—Be A Friend—Lift A Friend Higher Method of the last chapter. The second is to screen people and withhold power from destructive people. Another way to think of withholding power is to consider it *boycotting* an individual. Some techniques for screening people are discussed in the next section.

The idea of giving preferential treatment on one hand, and of withholding power on the other makes many people uncomfortable. One reason is that it requires you to make a judgment of others. While it's sometimes hard to judge people, the Make A Friend—Be A Friend—Lift A Friend Higher Method minimizes the chances that you'll misjudge and help the wrong kind of people. Some people also feel that they should love everyone unconditionally. I agree that everyone deserves help, but the form the help takes must be tailored to the person. I don't consider most people who are selfish as evil; I see them as immature—like children who are naturally self-centered. So I'm not advocating that they be completely shunned. Instead, I'm advocating that you help a few of them in the context of a relationship that will help them mature, in addition to helping them attain some of their goals. The next chapter, on transforming others, takes this further.

Another reason that people don't like this idea is that it seems to violate treating everyone equally. Americans are especially committed to ideas of equality, since our Constitution is founded on the principle that "All people are created equal." It may be that everyone is created equal but they don't end up that way. It took me the first ten years of my life to learn to treat everyone equally, and the next thirty years to unlearn it. If you are committed to equal treatment, that is your prerogative—but the world will get better faster if you use discernment to tailor your helping. In fact there is a paradox here. If you give equal help to all you meet, you will give no help to millions around the world and it won't be fair, but if you give more help to people involved in a chain reaction of empowerment, and if the chain reaction spreads, eventually many millions around the world will receive some help, so that in the end you will actually be more fair.

The concept of preferential treatment is easily to label as prejudiced, elitist, regressive, undemocratic or anti-business. While the power-abusers are often the first to reach for these labels, all of these labels can in fact be accurate if you apply the concept incorrectly. Nonetheless, I have arrived at this concept in the spirit of "care for the

whole” and of doing my level best for others. In the next section, you will see how skilled application of the concept will result in a better situation for all involved.

How to apply the concept

Often, it is right and natural to help spontaneously. I do not advocate that everyone must be screened before you help them. In other cases, I strongly recommend that you screen people in the process of making and being a friend to them. One way to screen people is to give them a little power and see what they do with it. People are very different, so different that I consider different people almost members of different species, depending on what their lives center on. In *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen Covey mentions ten centers that people focus their lives on:

- ◆ spouse-centered
- ◆ money-centered
- ◆ possession-centered
- ◆ friend/enemy-centered
- ◆ self-centered
- ◆ family-centered
- ◆ work-centered
- ◆ pleasure-centered
- ◆ church-centered (the community and practices)
- ◆ principle-centered (ethical-centered)

While there may be some overlap with his categories, I think he missed eight other centers:

- ◆ approval-centered
- ◆ God-centered
- ◆ power-centered
- ◆ service-centered
- ◆ mental life-centered (flow of inner thoughts)
- ◆ discovery/variety centered (explorer/adventurer)
- ◆ creativity-centered (an artist-type, for example)
- ◆ knowledge-centered (a professor-type, for example)

Although this list is not exhaustive, with it you can characterize practically everyone you know. The key is to examine where they spend their spare time and money, and what they tend to think (and talk) about a lot. Many people live their lives orbiting one

center. I can think of a certain man I know who is pleasure-centered. I know another man who is mental-life centered. Often, however, people's lives revolve around two or more centers. I know a woman who is career and family centered, and another who is power and pleasure centered.

Incidentally, now is a good time to note *your* center or centers. Which of the above dominate your thoughts and how you spend your time and money?

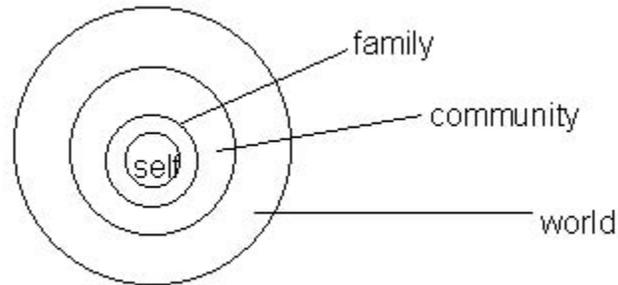
Besides dominating them, a person's center functions as a filter through which he or she views reality. For instance, if you are money-centered, you are consciously or unconsciously analyzing all of the ideas of this book based on how you could make money or lose money from them. The bias that your center gives you will affect how well or how poorly you absorb the different materials of this book.

While at one point Jesus is recorded as saying, "Judge not lest you be judged," at another point he said to judge others based on the fruit that they bear¹. But if you can learn how to judge trees by their bark, you don't have to wait for them to bear fruit. This approach demands more subtle techniques for discerning people's hearts and intentions. Obviously these can't be printed here because then the power-hungry would learn how to mask themselves.

Another way to classify people is according to the breadth of their circle of active concern. Children naturally start life self-centered. It's natural for them to grow up to care actively for their family and friends. More mature adults go beyond this to care

¹ Luke 6:43-45: "For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit; for each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thorns, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. The good man out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil man out of his evil treasure produces evil; for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks." (RSV)

actively for a certain category of people. For instance, someone might be concerned enough about the homeless to volunteer at a shelter. Someone else might actively care about the rights of prisoners, or the hungry.



Beyond this, and very rare, are the people who care for the whole world—those who care for all. These people might be focused on one issue, but approach it in an integrated manner. For instance, I know a woman whose career is in fighting hunger, but she’s oriented toward all people and all issues through her spirituality, politics, volunteer work, economic and other lifestyle choices.

I would hazard a guess that about 35% of adults are mainly self-interested, 50% are mainly self, family and friends-oriented, 10% of people are actively concerned goes beyond, to the community or other issues, and 1% of people have an active care for the whole. In addition, I’d add roughly 4% of adults to be primarily self-destructive or other-destructive through different addictions or untreated mental illnesses. These people can’t properly be considered self-centered because the illness or addiction is at the center.

Having made this estimate, I must issue three disclaimers: First, people constantly move between the levels. For instance, I am regularly self-centered, sometimes I’m family and friends centered, sometimes I’m community and issue centered, and sometimes I care for the whole. Yet I think that since most people gravitate toward one of the four levels or “hover” between two of them, it’s not an unfair categorization or judgment.

A second disclaimer is that you can’t assume that a person with a certain occupation automatically fits in a certain category. For example, you may immediately want to put a

labor activist into the community and issue category, but she might be doing it mainly for self-centered reasons. The same is true for almost any activity. Prayer, for instance, may be self-centered, if you're praying for what you personally want, or family and friend centered, if you're praying for them, or community and issue centered if you are praying for these, or God-centered, which might be considered prayer for the whole.

The third disclaimer is that these subtleties come clear in the course of a relationship with someone. Once I have a sense of someone's center and also how broad their circle of active concern is, I know how much help I want to give them. Self-centered and power-centered people will receive very little, if any, help from me. That is, unless I feel that there is a chance for transformation (explained in the next chapter.) The same is true for people who are family-and-friend-centered. People who are committed to service or certain issues will get a lot of help from me, and people who evidence a care for the whole will get the most help from me.

If you decide to screen people and to help some more and others less, I recommend that you do not make an abrupt change in any of your current relationships. Instead, make the shift gradually without announcing that you are now screening people. (If you tell an immature child that you are withholding something from him, guess what he'll focus all his attention and energy on getting!) Sometimes, however, I have been confronted by people I was withdrawing from. At that point, I openly admitted why I withdrew help, knowing that the chances they would accept the feedback without bearing a grudge were practically nil. I probably would not do this with someone I thought had the potential for violence, however.

When I help helpful people, I educate *them* on progressive preferential treatment, so that when their impact is multiplied, it is also tipped toward the generous.

Impact on your life

Until the concept of progressive preferential treatment becomes widely accepted, you can expect to be labeled negatively in any number of ways: unfair, prejudiced, cold-blooded, judgmental, and so forth. At these times, consider using this opportunity to educate people about the idea. If your motive is care for the whole and the long-range

best interests of everyone, you should state this candidly. But don't expect a rational response from most people, especially those whose power base is being weakened by your withdrawal of help.

The positive side of this is that when the dust settles, you will find that you have the respect and support of many rational people and of those who do care for the whole. Conversely, some of the friends you lose may not have really been friends in the first place if they were primarily concerned about how much help they could get from you.

Impact on the world

So much misery and suffering in the world result when self-centered people have power and other-oriented people don't. While those in power seem to have a natural inclination to keep it, every twenty or thirty years another generation comes along. It is with these people that other-oriented and all-oriented people can have the most impact. By extending extra help to other-oriented people and by withholding help from the selfish of this world, your positive impacts add up. With the chain reaction model, this can add up rapidly. Without the tools of conversion and lifestyle transformation of the next chapter, however, we will never have a world of harmony, since the people who are self-centered, or self-family-and-friends centered will otherwise always make up the vast majority. In other words, just boycotting self-centered people will not on its own be enough to change the world. The ongoing support of others, and the other upgrades are needed as well.

The solutions together

Progressive preferential treatment, when combined with the other upgrades, multiplies the positive impact of helping others. This is because instead of helping a random sample of people, you give more help to the people who will help others.

Summary

The dangers of indiscriminately helping everyone were illustrated with a fictional story in which immature or evil people were given power to do more damage. The focus of this chapter, then, concerns screening people before you give them assistance. While people can be categorized according to one or more of eighteen centers which are the focus of their activity, it's more important to categorize them according to the extent of their circle of active concern, from being narrowly self-centered to being broadly all-centered, with two intermediate circles. Once you estimate people's circle of active concern, you can then decide who to help and to what extent. The Make A Friend—Be A Friend—Lift A Friend Higher Method was offered as an approach that allows you to get to know someone well and be best able to judge the extent and form of your assistance.

“Merely doing good to the evil may be equivalent to doing evil to the good.”

— Saadi of Shiraz (13th century)

“I have the audacity to believe that people everywhere can have three meals a day for their bodies, education and culture for their minds, and dignity, equality and freedom for their spirits. I believe that what self-centered men have torn down, other-centered men can build up.” — Martin Luther King