

FRIENDSHIP RING

By Stuart White
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There are a handful of people who can call me at any time, day or night, and ask for no matter what, because I would do anything for them. It could be time, money, bailing them out of a difficult situation, providing a shoulder to cry on, or even putting myself in danger. I feel so indebted to them and so committed to the relationship that there could be no ask too big. On the other side of the scale there are quite a few people who quite frankly are so maxed out and over their limit when it comes to asking for favors from me, that I would hardly answer the phone let alone jump to their rescue. I am constantly dumbfounded that these people just don't get it, and will continue to ask and ask and take and take without giving anything back.

Steven Covey coined the phrase 'the emotional bank account' and when it comes to maintaining healthy relationships with others, this metaphor is probably one of the most powerful ideas ever created to explain interpersonal relationships. If you've never heard of this, it basically means that anyone with whom we have a relationship with, whether it be our co-workers, family or friends, we maintain a personal 'emotional' bank account with them. This account begins on a neutral balance. And just as with any bank account, we can make deposits and withdrawals. However, instead of dealing with units of monetary value, we deal with emotional units. The emotional units that Covey speaks of are centered on trust. When we make emotional deposits into someone's bank account, their fondness, trust, and confidence in us grows. And as a result our relationship develops and grows. If we can keep a positive reserve in our relationships, by making regular deposits, there will be greater tolerance for our mistakes and we'll enjoy open communication with that person. On the other hand, when we make withdrawals and our balance becomes low or even overdrawn, bitterness, mistrust and discord develops.

If we are to salvage the relationship, we must make a conscious effort to make regular deposits and keep our account healthy and in the black. And in tough emotional times it's okay to ask for an overdraft, so long as you pay it back as soon as you can.

It's about balance. There have been times when I have asked too much and given too little, and at other times the complete opposite leaving me feeling somewhat used and abused. But, I am finally learning to balance; to ask for help, seek counsel and advice from others when I need it and not feel guilty about it, and be more open to helping others. Putting in and taking out...appreciating the balance and the power of synergy that comes from working with people. It's the give and take – the ying and yang of relationships if you will.

It's probably my world view too. That is why I am more anti war than before, more sensitive to the exploitation of people and developing a somewhat greenish mentality by watching and caring about issues like the Amazon rain forest, saving the planet from pollution and worrying about Japanese killing dolphins... I think it's called seeing the bigger picture. It might simply be growing up (as opposed to the cringe, dare I say it, growing old). Whatever it is, let's call this understanding of balance a kind of maturity that's as necessary in the world of relationships, as the workplace and the world as a whole.

We really need to be so much more careful when it comes to the cost of what we do. If we treat our staff badly and put nothing in the relationship bank, don't expect much from them either. If we are dishonest in business know that the universe says 'what goes around comes around'. Without balance we will always be short-changed and dissatisfied. It's trying to get the balance that's tricky because what most people want always ends up costing way too much. Like the one man, intent upon becoming wealthy, determined to invest only in ventures which gave him advantage of others. A second, equally ambitious but wiser, was determined to build a business which offered the greatest advantage to others. Guess what? The first man became filthy rich, with four ex-wives and three Mercedes Benz. He never knew a quiet, satisfied moment in his life. The second man worked like a dog, and nearly everyone took advantage of him - which worried him little. He made a modest living, earned respect for what he was, and bored folk to tears with pictures of his grandchildren.

I guess its good to take stock every now and then to ask about the people in your life - are you having balanced relationships with them? Is there equal caring and sharing? Are the relations healthy and empowering? Or does one need something from the other, perhaps time, knowledge or positive energy? It is important to remember that we are not half of a whole needing to be filled up by another - we are a whole within ourselves. We come together to complement each other and to create a third entity - the balanced, healthy and empowering store of energy, synergy, empathy, sympathy, blood, sweat tears and mutual respect and understanding that both can borrow from when there's a dearth and pay back when there's a surfeit. That's what constitutes a relationship of equal partners where both are relaxed and at ease with each other. It's okay to be greedy and needy at times, just as long as you always pay back in full and in kind to others. That way your friends will always keep you on speed dial, instead of refusing to take your calls.

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Phone: 395 1640
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