

Don't Keep Score  
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Hey, with the national political process well underway, wouldn't it be cool if you had grown up with the President-to-be and he owed you a big favor? WRONG! (Sorry, trick question.) As tempting as that may sound, this kind of thinking will actually lead you to real failure in life on so many dimensions.

Nothing grosses me out more than someone who thinks in terms of "favor banks," where one person owes another and vice versa. People can tell when you're tallying up a total, and who likes that? The healthy alternative, of course, is someone who recognizes that success is gained through giving without keeping score.

In fact, keeping score may lead to failure. Hollywood talent agent Michael Ovitz spent his career keeping score and lording over those with less power, less money, and less cachet. When his career started to fail, an entire industry lined up gleefully with baseball bats and brass knuckles to help him fall faster and harder just for giggles.

I'll bet you're saying, "Sure, but that's just not me." Okay, but let's look a little deeper together. You may not be an Ovitz, but, come on, you keep score, too. Ever wonder at one of those lunches where the bill was split evenly, "did I get my fair share?" What's your rule on inviting someone back to dinner again if they don't invite you next? Ever put an offer out to someone actually hoping for something specific to be offered in return that you've been wanting? Nah? Never? Not at all? Nothing like this? B.S.!

Now here's the lesson: Get ready to let it go! Relationships are relationships. What I mean is, developing business relationships is just like developing friendships and even romantic interests. You don't keep score with your significant other, do you? If you do, my couples therapist in New York, Joe Lay, is awesome! But seriously, in those relationships, you give and the relationship grows. And, yes, you get back. But the first and most important thing you get back is the satisfaction of having given.

So, the bottom line here is "give." And I mean give on a huge scale. Make it a lifestyle, and you'll succeed, along with your friends and associates. Giving builds real relationships. Expecting and delivering payment, well, just doesn't.

If all this needs a little reinforcing, let's talk about what's in it for you. Sounds contradictory? Just wait. First and foremost, the answer is that you get the reward of having done something good for someone. Period! Then, almost as good, you also get to let go of the neurosis of score-keeping. You know what I'm

talking about. That deep belly angst when, for instance, the bill comes at lunch, the fretting over your having subsidized the other's gluttony-- Now: close your eyes, take a deep breath, and imagine not keeping score at all. Just let it go. Really imagine it. Imagine adopting this more and more. Think about how you might feel in your relationships, your job and your friendships without keeping score. Begin to feel that warmer, calmer, more sane feeling flowing through you? It's just easier not keeping score. I promise!

Your new attitude will show itself immediately and begin to affect every encounter you have. It's a true gift to yourself. A friend of mine from Harvard Business School, Stever Robbins, was in the audience of one of my talks on this subject recently. The next day, he went to a conference and thought he'd try an experiment: He decided that for the next few hours, he would just stop keeping score -- like, cold turkey. He decided to walk around and give with a vengeance: advice, introductions, compliments, appreciation, free copies of his new book manuscript, a quarter for the public phone, whatever he thought of was given with reckless abandon. A week later, he called me. He was blown away. He walked out of that conference courting three partnerships and enough business to keep him busy for months.

Now, of course, "Don't Keep Score" doesn't mean you should let yourself be taken advantage of. Here is a general rule of thumb to guide you: Just do those things that make you feel good - truly good inside. This is an internal, more spiritual test, and it's worth listening to, instead of that externally driven calculation.

Sold yet? No need to believe me now. Just try it for a while and then decide. What do you have to lose? Afraid you'll run out of things to give? C'mon, that's just silly. Why would you think your well is so shallow? Spend a week -- or just a day -- giving without expectation. Enjoy the good feeling. What's neat is that the world is likely to constantly conspire to make life even better for you. Now that's my kind of networking.