

PM WORLD BOOK REVIEW¹



Book Title: **Give and Take: Why Helping Others Drives Our Success**

Author: **Adam Grant**

Publisher: Penguin Random House

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Reviewer: **Sara Piracha**

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Introduction

Even though Adam Grant's *Give and Take* is not dedicated exclusively to the art of project management, I find the content of this book very appealing; the advice is simple yet very effective when applied correctly. This book is an excellent resource for anyone eager to learn and grow as an employee and as an individual.

Overview of Book's Structure

The book actually starts with a warning chapter which is unusual. It forewarns the reader of the dangers and repercussions of giving more than you get. After that it dives into the three reciprocity styles: Takers, Matchers, Givers. The first few chapters showcase the thought process behind the reciprocity styles, the motivations, the fears and the best ways to identify each one.

The second and third chapters focus on how givers, takers and matchers develop their networks and how their interactions create consequences that shape the fate of these networks. These chapters are important because they teach us effective methods that we can use to identify takers, matchers and givers in our dealings. There are clues that can help us spot a Taker in a Giver's clothes. A perfect example of such a person is Kenneth Lay, the former CEO of Enron. The picture of Ken Lay is juxtaposed next to Jon Huntsman Sr. in the annual reports of their organizations to highlight the contrast between their

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leadership styles. Takers work hard to seize the spotlight and credit. On the other hand, givers work hard to create more givers. Matchers are more concerned about paying back than paying forward.

The rest of the book focuses on why givers succeed, how they succeed and what sets them apart from takers and matchers. In my opinion, the key takeaways from these chapters are the qualities that all effective givers possess such as their modesty which shines through their communication style and their techniques to identify potential in other individuals and develop them into becoming the next generation of givers.

Towards the end of the book, Grant ensures that those who have identified themselves as givers or chosen to become one, are cautious and aware of the “doormat effect”. The doormat effect is evident when givers allow takers to walk all over them. The evidence presented suggests that gender also plays a key role in the success of givers. As a society, most of the time we are pleasantly surprised when men offer to help but consider themselves entitled when the same help is offered by women. However, there is another angle to consider. When men are too generous, they are punished more than women, maybe because they have violated the norms of masculinity. I found this discussion very interesting.

Finally, the last chapter begins with a beautiful quote and summarizes all the main themes discussed in the book. In short, givers measure success by asking themselves what have they done for people around them and if their contributions have enriched the lives of others.

Highlights: What’s New in this Book

The presentation of the concepts is refreshingly novel with a very real not always so pretty picture of our surroundings. The examples used to highlight the styles of giving support that even though our heart may be in the right place and we may even succeed in helping others, but there is always a cost to pay. Giving is an act of kindness done with awareness and cognizance, not a miracle reproducing itself without a source. At work and outside of work, we deal with and are in fact ourselves people with varying motivations and sense of morality. According to Grant, as altruistic as it may be, giving is most effective and cascades only when it is done from taking the ‘otherish’ approach. A concept which emphasizes that the giver must benefit from the act of kindness to prevent burnout. Without *otherish* giving, both the giver and the recipient suffer because it is not sustainable.

Continuing along the same lines, Grant also shares accounts of very successful takers to remind us that life is not always fair! We should strive to be givers but also be prepared to challenge, accept and survive among the takers. Being a taker doesn’t mean automatic failure and being a giver does not equal success without exception. As for the matchers, I found the term “karma police” humorous but equally sarcastic. Most of us like to believe

that we either are or strive to be fair in our dealings. A normal person is probably a matcher more than a taker or a giver in professional life. But the dynamics change drastically in our personal lives as giving comes much more naturally for our children, parents, friends and those dear to us. This is a testament to the fact that we can have more than one reciprocity style at any given time. There is a decision to be made and our past experiences, connections, origins, culture and preferences are all at play! As matchers, we play an essential role because we are the ones that glorify the givers and vilify the takers. Indeed, without the matchers, the reciprocity pendulum will swing out of balance.

Highlights: What I liked!

One of the highlights of this book is the beautiful quotes that the author has incorporated in each chapter to capture our attention, sometimes bring a smile to our faces and appreciate the wisdom of its writers. My personal favorite is from E.M. Foster, "*How do I know who I am until I see what I do?*"

Another strength of this book lies in the anecdotes that link the content to real life scenarios using a wide range of professions. The examples included share the experiences of politicians, sportsmen, philanthropists, technology moguls and many others. What I found most refreshing is that these stories also share the misses, not only the hits. When we think of one of the worst mistakes of NBA drafting history, we think of the late Stu Inman. He passed up on Bob McAdoo and Michael Jordan for players that were far less talented and skilled. These misses will never be forgotten. This is a story that I have personally heard from my instructor in one of my graduate level courses. In my case, the instructor ended the story on that note. It was not until I read this book that I came to know more about Stu Inman and his giving personality. As a giver, his achievements outnumber his losses by a landslide. To correctly gauge his success, we should look at his entire career ranging over decades rather than 2 specific drafting mistakes. This also proves the point that bad decisions are remembered and shared much more than good ones.

From the world of politics, most of us know that Abraham Lincoln is one of the most revered presidents of all times. But what was the mindset of this amazing commander-in-chief? What led him to the decisions that he made for the greater good of everyone? Did he step in as president and decided on Day 1 that his reciprocity style would be that of a giver? No! The seeds of *otherish* giving are planted long before people become big and famous. You do not have to be a celebrity or have a powerful title to employ otherish giving. Regardless of where you are and what you are doing, this principle can be helpful for you and others around you. There is no waiting time to master the art, the tips in this book can help us reexamine our own reciprocity style right now. However, it is important to remember that the art of giving does not operate in synchronicity with instant gratification. It can take months, sometimes years, before the opportunity that bares the fruit for you may manifest and present itself. Patience is certainly needed and abundantly found among the most prolific givers.

Who might benefit from the Book?

Every reader can benefit from this book. If a giver understands and applies the concepts correctly, it can protect him/her from exhaustion and enable adding more people to their network who would be willing to contribute in the same manner. This is what helps multiply the rewards of giving for everyone. As the network of people increases, so does the size of the pie and everyone's portion of it. For matchers, this book appreciates their fair nature and encourages them to broaden their point of view when gauging the intent behind the actions of others. For a taker, the biggest benefit of this book can be the realization of their reciprocity style. The actions, mindset, motivation behind this style is explained in depth and if nothing else, forces all of us to reflect on our actions and how we enforce the concept of "give and take" in our daily life.

Conclusion

I enjoyed reading this book and knowing what actually transpired behind the success stories that we know of but at a surface level. The art of distinguishing fakers from real givers is a gem of advice especially for those that are beginning their careers and developing relationships with a desire for longevity and mutual benevolence.

In my opinion, the examples that are presented could have been authored more concisely resulting in the book being 25 to 30 pages shorter. Overall, I recommend reading this book because it focuses on skills that every single one of us can use regardless of the path we choose. We are encouraged to take action and create positive impact for ourselves and others around us.

For more about this book, go to:

<https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/312425/give-and-take-by-adam-grant/>

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About the Reviewer



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Sara Piracha is a senior associate with KPMG Audit Technology group. Her work focuses on modernizing the audit experience and supporting strategic initiatives with technology. Her areas of expertise include building and maintaining strong relationships with senior audit leaders and stakeholders to understand business objectives and facilitate strategic process redesign.

Sara has worked as a project manager and senior analyst for several Fortune 500 companies. She has an extensive background in finance and accounting. Her project management experience includes a variety of areas ranging from software implementation to auditing and compliance. In her past roles, she has served in various industries including Aerospace, Transportation & Logistics and Healthcare IT.

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