

**“NICE PEOPLE: GIVERS OR TAKERS?”**

By Carri Taylor

This may be a tough article for some of you to read. On the other hand, this may be ‘freedom’ for others. I will attempt to clarify the paradox of the “nice person” or “giver.” Some of you may be wondering why others don’t appreciate your attempts at being what you would consider thoughtful and giving. Others of you may have people in your life that are “nice people” or “givers” but somehow drive you crazy with guilt over your inability to express anger at them.

“Givers” (nice people) who are actually “takers” have a theme song entitled “I Want Acceptance.” They spend their time figuring out how to sing it to other people. The verse starts out something like this: “I want you to like me, because if you like me, that means I’m likeable. In order for you to like me, I do things for you and give things to you. See how nice I am?”

What they are not singing is, “If others like me, then I can like myself. Since I don’t appreciate myself much, I’ve got to figure out how I can please others, because then they will like me. When they like me they validate that I am.” The motive behind the song is the belief that if they give others what they think others want, others will give them what they want – a confirmation of self. Unfortunately (as most of us do), they give others what they want for themselves and this doesn’t always score.

When “givers” (nice people) don’t score, they get angry. Then the second verse of the song starts something like this, “How could this person or these people not validate and appreciate me for giving to them?” Even when they do score they get angry, because of the never-ending energy and mind reading they put into their relationships. After that the martyr/victim mentality and/or lifestyle sets in. Then the theme song changes from “I Want Acceptance,” to “Everyone Rejects Me.”

I think this comes from a basic internal emptiness. Since “givers” (nice people) are looking for others to give them their self worth by appreciating all their efforts in giving to others, they are shifting the burden to the others in their life to make them OK – to validate that they are a worthy being. This becomes love with a hook in it.

I recently interviewed a self-avowed male recovering “nice person” and this is what he said, “When things are not going well in a relationship I work harder to be more *effective*.” I then asked, “By whose definition of ‘*effective*’ are you living?” He said, “By the other person’s definition. But I guess I keep digging the hole deeper.” I then asked, “How do you know what the other person’s definition is?” After thinking about it, he responded with, “I guess I make it up, so it’s my definition.”

He also added that, “As a “giver” I can be ‘positioning’ myself in a situation to reduce the risk of conflict with the other person. In order to do this I put on the mask of charity, i.e., ‘where would you like to go to eat?’ And the minute the other person commits, I’m safe because I know more about the “receiver” than the “receiver” knows about me, the “giver.”

It seems to me he realized he wasn’t getting anywhere but didn’t know what else to do. This particular person (who really represents many of the other “nice people” on the planet) has given over the control of his own life to others. The paradox is; he is really looking for a way to control life – his and others.

He also told me about his grandmother who was fairly well off and generous with her time and money. Inevitably her gifts contained at least a condition, if not an outright hook in them. The hook was, if you gave her what she wanted, which was anything from appreciating her to agreeing with her; you were O.K. and continued to receive her gifts. Heaven forbid, if you were to respond in any manner except that which she required, you immediately went on the ‘black list’ and were rarely removed. Her giving was her means of controlling the people and environment around her. Giving can equal charity if it’s unconditional, but it can also have a hidden agenda based on the giver’s insecurity.

Subconsciously and even consciously, the others in nice people’s lives feel the burden. They get put in the position of having to respond and accept these ‘givings’ whether they like them or not. But since it looks so “nice,” how can they feel resentful? Then the guilt sets in and finally anger toward the “giver” (nice guy).

I’ve seen some “receivers” extremely angry with the nice “givers.” It is very difficult to interact with a person that “isn’t” – in other words, since the focus seems to be on the “receiver” and what the “giver” can do for the “receiver,” the “receivers” are never sure at first where the “giver” really is, so they “aren’t. At first it seems pretty wonderful being the “receiver,” but after a while it starts becoming a “take over” of the “receiver’s” life. Now it becomes painstakingly clear that it’s all about the “giver.” How do you nicely get away from one of these “givers?” You don’t!! Unless this is a person you no longer want in your life.

Interestingly enough since “opposites attract, marry and attack,” givers and receivers find each other and sign up for the dance because at first it seems to work well. To stop the dance, both have to understand how dangerous it is and desire change. Both have to want to quit. How? By learning a new dance and being responsible for their own part of the dance instead of blaming their partner.

True givers are able to give whether it is received or not. Is this possible for humans? Maybe not totally, but it certainly is something to aim for in my opinion. The greatest model is God. He gave His only Son and at the same time gave us the choice whether or not to receive that gift. What does it take to give like that?

First of all I have to be full, not empty. As I've worked with people over the years, I see disappointment after disappointment regarding relationships – whether marriage, family, friends, co-workers, employees, or employers. So many expectations are put on relationships at a sub-conscious level – wanting to be filled and healed from previous relational wounds.

In any situation, the higher the expectation, the greater the fall when it doesn't come to pass. Then sadness, fear and/or disappointment set in. This turns to anger and that is usually projected on the person, event or object of our disappointment, rather than checking inward to our own anticipated expectations and beliefs going into a relationship or an event.

Whether a nice giver or guilty receiver, the anger I feel belongs to me. My task is to take the journey from my perfect world - expectations and beliefs about how things should be: to my real world – how things really are. My job as a communication skills trainer and coach is to help people take that journey gracefully – with skills.

When you think about it, who is easier to control? Others or yourself? When I own my own fear, sadness, and disappointment that lead to anger, the task actually becomes easier. As disgusted as I may be with myself when I start realizing how controlling I am, I have the power to do something about me. In fact, that's where the recovery journey starts – an honest awareness of how I really am: 1) my behavior; 2) my beliefs that 3) result in my emotional responses and 4) determine how I interpret the world around me; and then 5) honestly take a look at what I *really* want (goals, dreams and desires). All this has to be done without any “sugar-coating.”

Can it be done? Absolutely! The process of how this happens is explained in my article ***“Do You Hear What I Hear? .....No!”***