

Are you a Giver or a Taker?

By Greg Giesen

Do you give more than you take from others? I know, I know, you're a giver right? You better read this story first as you might be surprised.

The Story

Every time I entered the large hotel conference room, I wasn't quite sure what to expect. You see, after every break during this three-day intensive workshop, the instructors would completely change-up the room to accommodate the next exercise/experience. This time was no different. The room had been completely cleared out with the exception of ninety-five chairs, neatly placed in a large circle in the center of the room.



Now what are they going to make us do? I thought, still a little apprehensive about being there.

The room felt cold as we were instructed to quickly take a seat. I looked around the circle, exchanging nervous nods to anyone that would look back. Within a couple of minutes every chair was filled. The doors slammed shut. It was 2pm exactly.

A stern voice bellowed out over the sound system. "Please number off."

Immediately from one end of the circle I could hear the faint, "One...two...three," and so on until the ascending numbers came my way like falling dominos. "Sixty-two," I yelled, thankful I was still paying attention. Within seconds all ninety-five of us had our numbers.

"Now take out a pen and pad of paper and divide your sheet into two columns. Label the first column *Giver* and the second column *Taker*."

He continued. "In just a minute we will form two circles. The outer circle will remain seated while the inner circle will be standing and moving to their right. For those of you in the inner circle, you are to look at each person and say *Giver* or *Taker* and

then move on to the next person. There will be conversation. For those of you in the outer circle, you are to keep a running count of your *Giver* and *Taker* scores. Once everyone in the inner circle has provided feedback to everyone in the outer circle, we will reverse the circles and continue the process until everyone has given and received feedback from everyone else. Do you understand?"



We all nodded.

"What? I didn't hear you!"

A resounding *Yes!* filled the room.

"Begin."

Before I could look up, a participant was standing in front of me, gazing at me with uncertainty. He paused.

"Let's go, let's go!" yelled a nearby instructor.

"Taker." His apologetic eyes moved to the next participant on my left.

Taker! I thought to myself. *Are you serious! I'm not a taker!*

A woman who I briefly talked with came by next. "Taker."

OMG! What's going on here!

Then Jack, a member from my small group came through. *Surely he'll give me a Giver. He knows me for Pete's Sake!*

"Taker."

I gazed down at the floor in confusion. *What am I missing here!*

As each participant shuffled by, so did my distorted scores...*Taker, Taker, Giver, Taker, Giver, Taker, Taker, Taker...*and on it went.

By the end, I felt as if someone had punched me in the stomach. *How could people be so wrong about me!* I lamented. I knew I was a *Giver*...or so I thought. Something was wrong. Why, even my small group...the group of people who I thought knew me...primarily scored me as a *Taker*.

Just then the lead instructor's voice came over the sound system. "Now add up your scores in both columns." He paused. "Once you've done that, I'd like you to rearrange yourself in the circle beginning with highest to lowest scores in the *Giver* category. Quickly now!"

I could only shake my head. *Are you serious! I'm already humiliated internally and now I get to be humiliated in front of everybody. Can this workshop get any worse!*



Quickly the group moved in all directions as people frantically compared scores to find their spot. It had that organized chaos feeling of lining up for a Southwest flight; only this time I clearly wasn't going to be in the "A" or "B" group.

I gazed at my score of 33 for the *Giver* category. A large gentleman was seated in the second-to-last seat, looking dejected. "What's your number?" I asked, trying to downplay this exercise.

"Twenty-eight," he replied. "You?"

"Thirty-three," I said apologetically, like I had done something wrong.

"You're next to me then," as he pointed to the seat on his left. "Welcome to the losers!"

To add insult to injury, just as everyone found their seats, the instructor entered the circle and asked us all to recite our *Giver* scores, beginning with the highest score on down to the lowest score.

At this point all I could think about was where the nearest exit doors were. I wondered if someone would try to tackle me if I made a break for it before my turn came. *Would anyone really care if I just left?* I thought as I scanned the room. What I did know at that moment was that I would rather have been anywhere than where I was. I was not happy and wanted out!

Truth be told, the only thing that kept me from running out of the room during the conclusion of the *Giver and Taker* exercise was knowing that the small groups would be getting together in a few minutes to process this experience. As much as I wanted to leave, I felt compelled to hear from my own teammates why they gave me the *Taker* scores. I just needed to know. Besides, as I saw it, I was already at rock bottom on the humiliation scale, so the only place left to go was *up!*

The Defining Moment

With my tail between my legs, I headed over to Breakout Room B where my group was assembling. I could hear loud talking and laughter as I entered, which surprised me a bit. *I'm so glad they are having such a good time at my expense*, I selfishly thought, as I took a seat around the conference table.

The topic of conversation quickly shifted over to the exercise as group members began sharing their experiences. The energy in the room was booming, making my sullen disposition stand out even more. Truthfully, I've never been very good at masking my feelings and this was no exception. I was confused, shook up, and a little angry with the group.

Suddenly the room became quiet...too quiet. I slowly looked up only to see five pairs of concerned eyes looking right at me.

"Are you okay?" asked Kathy.

"Not really."

"What's going on?" she asked softly.

The rest of the group leaned in to hear my response.

"I was humiliated out there...that's what!" I said. "Everybody, including each of you, called me a *Taker*."

Jack jumped in. "Greg, I don't think you are a *Taker*. In fact, I know you're not."

“Then why did you say *Taker*?” I asked.

“It had nothing to do with who you are. It was all about how you were showing up in the moment.”

I was confused. “What moment?”



“The moment when I was standing in front of you. That moment.”

Heads were nodding around the table.

Jack continued. “Dude, you looked scared sitting there in that chair, like you were expecting something bad to happen. Do you know what I mean?” he asked.

Before I could respond, Janice stepped into the conversation. “For me it was based on how I was feeling in your presence...and truthfully I was having trouble connecting to you. Believe me, I wanted to say *Giver* so bad, but I wasn’t feeling it.”

“What was I doing that said *Taker*?” I asked.

“It was what you weren’t doing,” replied Tom, another member. “The people that were smiling and radiating love while sitting there were the people who got *Giver* scores from me. When I got to you,” as he paused to search for the right words, “I didn’t get anything back. I don’t know if that makes any sense but you weren’t giving anything. It was like you were taking...”

Just then it all became crystal clear. I jumped up. “I get it! You weren’t judging me as a person but responding to how I was coming across in that moment.”

The group simultaneously agreed. “Exactly.”

I could feel a surge of energy engulf me. “So instead of embracing the moment and welcoming each person that stood in front of me, I braced myself for whatever judgment was about to come my way.”

“Yes, yes, yes!” yelled Jack. “You got it!”

I was smiling now as I looked at the group. “This was powerful. Thank you!”

“Say more?” asked Kathy. “What was powerful?”

“The insight I just got about myself.” I replied. “You see, I’ve been responding and reacting to life instead of embracing it. Just like in that exercise, I’ve been wearing a shield to protect myself.”

My voice started to crack as my emotions took over. “I didn’t realize it...until now.”

“So what are you going to do differently?” asked Janice.

“I’m going to embrace life. I’m going to focus on being more in the moment. I’m going to be present with people.”

As I glanced around the room, I could see I had opened a floodgate of emotions within the group. Tears began to flow as each member talked about their own life struggles. It was of those rare moments in time when you could literally feel the love in the room echoing off the walls.



“I told you,” said Jack, as we embraced shortly thereafter on our way out of the room.

“You told me what?”

“That you were a *Giver*. You made that happen,” as he pointed over to Breakout Room B.

I smiled. *That's right. I am a Giver!*

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