

How can being helpful advance one's scientific career?

We have all been in situations where we've put in too many hours in the lab with seemingly unending experiments, grant deadlines and presentations. Imagine it is one of those days, it's late and you're (finally!) getting ready to head home. What if the undergraduate student in the lab wants your help with something – to be more specific, something that is not necessarily going to help you in the form of a publication? When confronted with situations like these, we think that it's better to look out for one's own gain, and try and get ahead despite everything else. In fact, we think that people who get ahead do so because of their ruthlessness and selfish nature. People who succeed, we think, are not the ones who stop and help someone, especially if it doesn't benefit them.

In fact, in a new book called '[Give and Take](#)', author Adam Grant says the opposite may be true. He classifies people in the workplace into three categories – takers (people who put their personal gain above all else), matchers (people who help others *only if* it benefits them), and givers (people who are genuinely interested in the well-being of others; people who help others without expectation). Grant says that one way to identify a taker is by figuring out who appeases only the important people (in a lab, the PI); and treats everyone else as if they don't matter. People do eventually figure them out, and are not willing to help them, or collaborate with them. The majority of the workplace is made up of matchers – these people don't go out of their way to help people, but don't build networks or trust or collaborations either. It may seem safe to be a matcher, but Grant says that it's best for your career and the future of your company to be a giver.

Grant suggests that although it may seem counterintuitive, givers actually do climb the ladders of success. Since givers have a genuine interest in making things better and seeing others succeed, people trust them because they know of their good intentions; co-workers are

more likely to collaborate with them and people are willing to give givers more chances. Being a giver is good not only for yourself, but for the company as well. Hence, Grant says it is important for people who're hiring to hire givers; or at least not hire takers.

How can one be a giver, yet manage to have time to accomplish personal goals?

Admittedly, there are cases when people spend too much time and energy helping other people out without getting their own work done. Grant suggests one way do is by being smart about giving – instead of helping others all day long, set times during the day when you can assist people. Also, be aware of what's going on around you. Be generous and selfless, but at the same time, don't let people take advantage of your giving tendencies.

No one in our graduate or postgraduate careers talks to us about these things. It does seem that academia is a dog-eat-dog world, where you need to trample on other peoples' toes to get ahead. But for the ones in science that want to get out of academia and into the non-profit sector, or industry; maybe this is one way to start. For a PhD branching out into industry or non-profit sector, soft skills like communication, a capacity to connect with others, manage difficult personalities, and manage in a way that you and the people you work with enjoy the work are more important than performing a technique with finesse. Are we likeable and easy to get along with? Do we look out only for our interests or are we interested in the betterment of people around us, and of the company?

Hence, it is worthwhile to remember that helping people for its sake, without any expectations can actually be good for us. And of course, it may not bring you any benefits in tangible ways, you will still make networks and connections and collaborations. Selfness and generosity are not just feel-good things that have no place in the real life- cultivating these characteristics can help us make the leap out of academia and into industry.