

A Fairy Tale: Why Fairness is Essential in Healthy Work and Relationships

"If you're a giver, know your limits because takers don't have any."

The concept of categorizing people into Givers, Takers, Sharers, and Matchers has intrigued me for years because it helps to explain a lot about how we portray ourselves and respond in relationships. It has also amazed me how many people I have considered to be takers who believe they are givers, how many givers are actually takers, and how we will quickly shift from one to the other based on a multitude of factors and conditions. Dividing the world into these categories can be a helpful way of understanding problems in work and relationships as well as how to more effectively interact with others in our world.

Some people say you can divide the world into three types of people... those that can count and those that can't. You can also divide people into how they interact with the world and treat other people as Givers, Takers, Matchers, and Sharers or a unique combination, depending on situations and/or conditions. Which do you think you are? These categories have helped our evolutionary development and are shaped by two drives... the drive for survival of the fittest and the drive of mutual dependence. Both have helped our species to evolve, but the more "civilized" we become the less beneficial survival of the fittest is compared to the one of mutual dependence and a sense of reciprocal fairness.

The need for Fairness is hardwired in us and a very fundamental principle for the success of human beings. Fairness is not only a human trait, but also regularly observed with other species where cooperation is a necessary agent of their collective survival. Without cooperation of give and take, humans potentially would have been extremely limited and more than likely we would have become extinct like so many other humanoid species of the past. For instance, "Inequity Response," the perception that one is being treated unfairly, has been observed in infants as well as primates, but not in lower life forms. One study reported that when one monkey observes another of her group not getting her fair share that this monkey responds in protest on the other's behalf. See video here of monkey's inequity response: [VIDEO](#)

What makes the evolutionary advantage of Fairness possible for humans is empathy for others and our highly evolved ability to delay gratification for a greater benefit to ourselves. In our culture, humans understand and



expect there to be larger pay offs later for immediate sacrifices. By making sacrifices of "Fairness," humans have learned and have come to expect that there will be a larger pay off later. However, if the pay offs don't come or are less than the cost incurred, humans will eventually stop giving once the costs disproportionately outweigh the gains. Fairness is such an inherent aspect in ourselves, like a fish not knowing it's wet, we are unaware that we are acting on it until a high enough level of perceived unfairness is reached. This sense of cooperation and fairness is programmed into us from a very young age (share with your younger brother to be a "good boy") and is deeply ingrained in our economics, laws, and cultural systems. Although unconscious much of the time, humans regularly evaluate themselves and others, their investments, their returns, and how it serves them overall based on Fairness. It has become second nature in our interactions, expectations, and value systems leading to a strong sense of what is right and what is wrong (i.e. Fair).

[Click here for a comical video demonstration of children and delaying gratification. VIDEO](#)

Obviously, this system of fairness is far from fair in many cases because of the complex mixture of factors in each of our Fairness personalities as well as the political and economic injustices inherent in the systems we are in. To help illustrate how this plays out between people, I have divided people into classifications of Givers, Takers, Matchers, and Sharers. These can be viewed as overlapping, like circles in a Venn diagram where most of us are a combination of all four of these at various times depending upon the situations and conditions. So are you a Giver, Taker, Matcher or Sharer?