

Takers: From Foolish Selfish to Wise Selfish

I was pleasantly surprised that several people, who describe themselves as Takers, asked me to write on advice for Takers on how to not be takers. I was glad because takers are often labeled the bad guys. The narcissists. The selfish ones. A simple google search will reveal all the negative connotations associated with takers and how givers should protect themselves from them. But rather than shaming people – takers are not “bad” people, but people who learned to deal with the world in a manner that is considered “taking.” Recognizing that you’re a taker is the first step towards growth. And as you’ll see later in this piece, it’s not entirely a bad thing that you’re a taker – don’t get too excited...

Most takers are unconscious that they are takers because of how they perceive themselves and the world. Many takers became takers because they grew up in a world that required them to “take care” of themselves – to survive at the time. Taking is not something they woke up and chose to be – “Hey! I think I want to be a taker. What a wonderful thing to be!” As kids, takers grew up in circumstances that made them develop the habit of taking – scarcity, competition, having to fight and manipulate to get what they needed – which led them to develop unconscious patterns of survival. But they’re now adults and they don’t need to keep doing so to survive.

Most takers are shamed by the self-proclaimed “givers” who oftentimes only give in ways that are convenient or valuable to self-proclaimed “givers” and expect that others reciprocate just as much and if they don’t then they are bad and viewed as takers. These confessed “givers” are particularly good at seeking validation for merely giving the bare minimum and only giving what makes them feel good – “Look, I’m so good at giving.” “Don’t you see how much I’m giving?” “Why don’t you appreciate how much I’m giving?” – which may mean that they’re not truly givers, but takers in denial and in disguise. So, when these “givers” encounter takers, they may shame them because they see a part of themselves in the takers. If givers were really givers, then they wouldn’t be complaining about takers because they “love” to give and takers give them something that they love i.e. giving. This is helping to demonstrate that people who think they are “givers” usually aren’t. Givers use a lot of shame on takers to control them as a means to get what they want. You’ll know them by their big acts (or even small) of giving with their expectations to be praised for it and if the takers don’t recognize these efforts, then the “false givers” will go on and on about how generous they are while guilt-tripping others for not giving as much as they do.

What would have happened if “takers” didn’t learn to “take” when they were children? Many of them would have become passive, broken, and not get their needs met. I’m glad that many “takers” learned to take for their own physical and mental wellbeing when they were young – that’s how they managed to survive and function in their world. The question to ask yourself now is.... “Is taking still as necessary?”



We could argue that takers had a better advantage at getting ahead in life in less modern times. It’s an evolutionary drive after all. It used to be survival for the fittest – only the strongest ones survive and get the largest piece of the pie. However, in the modern age of successful collaboration, taking isn’t as powerful, necessary, and effective as it once was. Current studies demonstrate that takers usually end up being the ones who lose most in the end because they can’t keep jobs, are imprisoned, and fail at relationships time and time again.

When I was a child, I developed the habit of taking to function as best as I could in the world. I grew up the youngest in the family, and as the baby, I was taken care of. I wasn’t charged with taking care of a younger brother or sister running into traffic or putting disgusting things in their mouths – it was the duty of my siblings to do that for me. I was used to my needs being met so I was never quite concerned that anyone else didn’t have theirs met. In addition, I had to learn to fight to get what I felt was rightfully mine and not be overrun by my two older sisters and get what I thought was “fair.” Because of my age, it didn’t seem fair that they were given more privileges, power, and rights than I did. At that age, I couldn’t understand that this perceived “unfairness” was more due to the age differences between us. Based on these experiences, I unconsciously became a taker by developing a sense of entitlement and need to fight to get what was mine.

Fortunately, other people were able to bring this to my awareness in ways that I could start to see it and start to reflect on it. They did it without shame and in a manner that helped me look at my patterns – which is how takers should be approached if you want to help them change. This has helped me see how I have been taking more than my fair share, setting things up so that that I “win” and how I fought based on my biased sense of what fairness was. In retrospect, I can see how not only others tended to lose, but how I was the one who lost the most.

Like me, many takers begin to realize that once they shift from the microcosm of the family to the macrocosm of the world, that the world doesn't operate the same way, doesn't support the "taking," and that costs will start to accrue with consequences. They find themselves in a world that frowns upon their taking and also calls it out. This is initially confusing for the taker because they honestly thought the world worked that way and should adjust as such, but that's not how it works.

One area that this tends to be particularly delayed is in romantic relationships. This tends to be delayed because the only people who are typically attracted to and remain in relationships with takers are givers. Some takers begin to realize the short-sighted gains of this approach and some even want to genuinely be Sharers because it has a higher sense of integrity to it. They start to become more aware of the hidden costs they have been paying by taking as well as the adverse impact it has had on others. When their behavior is internally challenged and as awareness slowly happens, they experience cognitive dissonance because they're torn between who they've always been and who they know they should work towards becoming. As the taker starts to become more aware that they are takers, an internal struggle starts to develop because the taker part of them that has developed out of survival doesn't want to give up a sense of being safe. While another part of the "taker" longs for true equality, deeper connection, and healthy experiences of being a Sharer.

Moving from being a Taker to a Sharer is a process that requires diligence on the part of the person and a willingness to look at their behavior without shame and guilt. Shame and guilt usually drive things back into the unconscious and disrupt true change because you're prone to thinking – "What's the point of trying if this is who I've always been?" It's even harder if outside forces keep shaming and guilt-tripping you but remember that this is your journey and it's not them who get to decide who you become – that's your sole responsibility. Look at change as you doing the very best you can so that everything around you can prosper. Think of the reward of healthier relationships – with yourself and others.

Honest reflection, insight, and motivation to be a better human being are much more effective in making long-lasting change. View yourself as someone who is in a constant wheel of change. You are allowed to change your mind and behavior when you come into new information or when you become more aware of yourself. Being a taker doesn't make you a bad person – just part of the human categories like every one of us – none of us is better than the other because we all find ourselves taking, giving and sharing from time to time. You owe yourself the grace to evolve and become a better person – don't underestimate your ability to grow into someone you (and others) never thought you would. I definitely have!

I feel good about having made the changes that I have while also being okay with I still have work to do. You won't automatically move from being a taker to a sharer just by reading this article. There's a lot of inner work that you have to do and you need to be okay with exploring your past and your current

behavior to create a better future – one step at a time. And let me remind you for the umpteenth time that there's no shame in that – you should be proud of yourself for recognizing this much.

Moving from a taker to a sharer

The Dalai Lama talked of being intelligently selfish – I know! But it's better than it sounds. Stay with me. Here's what he had to say in his book *Beyond Religion; Ethics for a whole world*; ***"Now there is nothing inherently wrong with pursuing one's own interests. On the contrary, to do so is a natural expression of our fundamental disposition to seek happiness and to shun suffering. In fact, it is because we care for our own needs that we have the natural capacity to appreciate others' kindness and love. This instinct for self-interest becomes negative only when we are excessively self-focused."***

What is important is that when pursuing our own self-interest, we should be 'wise selfish' and not 'foolish selfish.' Being foolish selfish means pursuing our own interests in a narrow, shortsighted way. Being wise selfish means taking a broader view and recognizing that our own long-term individual interest lies in the welfare of everyone. Being wise selfish means being compassionate."

Watch this YouTube video on wise selfishness.

This perspective by the Dalai Lama makes it easier to shift from being a taker to a sharer. By caring and having compassion for others and listening to their needs, you also gain so much more. When you start viewing your self-interest as doing the things that bring you the most genuine joy like healthy relationships and inner peace. I've noticed that by shifting more toward being a Sharer, my relationships and sense of self have significantly improved. There has been less conflict and more success in my relationships and work. And, I have really enjoyed the sense of being more heart-focused and an ability to feel and love at a deeper level.

In an effort to become more of a Sharer than a taker, I have done the following;

● **When cutting a piece of food or dividing anything up, I give the other person a bit more than half.** It's interesting to see the internal struggle I have over giving a just slightly bigger piece of pie to someone else. Because of past conditioning, I want the bigger piece but I stop myself from doing it – really satisfying if you ask me because I know that I've done something for someone else that the old me would have fought not to.

● **Carefully listening to what other people have to say about my taking in unhealthy ways.** At this point, I have more acceptance of myself so I can hear criticism with a bit more grace and more of an open mind without being defensive. Some will say you're a taker and others will say you're not and both of them may be right to some extent. The responsibility is to consider what may be true and to change in a manner that is best for you and your world.

● **Recall what people in your past have said about you and try to see from their perspective how they would have perceived you as a Taker.** Some of the people saying this were actually Takers themselves and blame you while others were not. Consider the similar narratives from people that believe you are a taker. If different people say the same thing, it's quite probably true. For instance, when I was in my early 20s a woman, I was dating shared how selfish I was and I pointed out to her that I give a lot and expect a lot, but was not selfish. Then, in my later 20s, a woman I was dating said that I was selfish; and I pointed out to her that she was actually the selfish one and that she was trying to take more from me than she deserved. In my early 30s, I was dating a woman and she said that I was selfish; and at this point, I decided that maybe there was some truth to what the three of them had been saying about me and that I needed to start reflecting on myself instead of blaming and justifying. I am deeply grateful to these women for having helped me to see something about myself that I also wanted to be different about myself.

● **Look for an opportunity to do more than your fair share.** People think you are great when you do this. For instance, I regularly will do the dishes at another person's dinner party. They think I'm great, while I have spun it in my head that my "generosity" is just making up for how much I have taken from others in the past. Don't give to get praised or seen or for people to feel indebted to you – do it because you feel the need to and it's the right thing to do. It makes you feel so much better when your intentions are well-meaning.

● **Look for opportunities to give more – in time, resources, attention.** There are so many opportunities to give and help more that we overlook. You just need to be more open to it. Ask, "How can I help you?" "What can I contribute here?" "How can I add value?" "How do you need me to show up for you at this moment?" "Is there anything I can do to help ease your burden?"

● **There are sharers around you – ask them how they do it.** Observe then assimilate. This requires the willingness to learn and change. It's not that they know everything and are perfect but they have something you seek – the ability to share. So, keep at it – most times people will gladly and willingly help show you the way.

● **Ask yourself.... "Really, how much more do I really need?"** And, consider comparing how much abundance you have

compared to the rest of the world and start sharing. What does it profit you to gain everything when others barely have anything? Challenge your privilege and how it's made it possible to have always been on the receiving end of things. Open your mind to all the ways that others are lacking – it will help you develop gratitude and start giving more.

● View this as a continuous process. I think that most people view me as a Giver/Sharer in my life, but clearly not all the time. I have worked for years to be more this way, while at the same time seeing that I still have a lot of Taker hidden in my thoughts and actions. It is a process that I have come a long way on and feel good about which keeps me motivated along this path.

● **Aim to seek balance.** Healthy giving is not a matter of running yourself to the ground for others to be happy. It's not ignoring your basic emotional and physical needs for others. It's finding a balance where you and others win. It's adopting a healthy view of fairness where everyone, including you, profits. It's an inclusive mindset where you not only think of yourself but other people's needs.

● **Shift from scarcity mindset to an abundant mindset.** When you think from scarcity, it's hard to give because you think you're depleting in resources but when you give from an abundance mindset, you understand that the more you give, the more you get. People with an abundance mindset know that the laws of the universe are always at work and that they don't run out just because they give more – they only replenish and flourish.

An important thing to note is becoming a "sharer" is not becoming passive and a doormat. Healthy sharers are assertive in their interactions and communication. Set healthy boundaries with yourself and others. With more self-awareness, may come the tendency to overdo the giving to try and make up for your taking. Prioritize who you need to help/give to, how you know you can give/help –and setting aside the time to help/give.

If you are a Taker and have read this far on your own, then you are clearly on the right track to being a more amazing person. Now that you have insight on what you can do better, then you need to do it. It's not an overnight process but you'll get there one thought and action at a time. I wish you well!