

A Balancing of the Scales

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Ruminating on the concept of 'Brownie Points'....



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Ruminations on Brownie Points

As I grow older, I am surprised at how often people arrive at judgments using only a part of the knowledge they have accumulated; when a well-rounded opinion where both sides of the ledger are considered, would be almost as easy.

Itâ€™s not laziness. I wish it were that simple. I think it represents how people are much more impacted by negatives than positives. In my book, before a big decision, they should get equal weight when we load up the scales of justice.

Iâ€™m shocked at how often this is not the case.

Think for a second how maybe a loved one will remember the one or two critical things you may have said, and seemingly ignore the 30 positive things you have said or done. Criticism resonates more with people. Thatâ€™s not an opinion, its fact, at least my in my experience.

So *why* is that?

When did compliments lose their impact? And when did criticism (and Iâ€™m talking about both constructive criticism, and mean spirited criticism) become this monolithic, looming presence like a black cloud, by comparison?

Compliments tend to slide right off of most peoples shoulders. I often can literally see this happen. And criticism or meanness tends to bury fathoms deep, yet still can be recalled in an instant.

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Criticism hurts. Compliments make you feel good.

Where does the weight differentiation come in? Is it that people have grown to mistrust nice gestures, to simply not assign the same value to them as they do to criticism? Again, to me that is obviously the case.

Checks in the negative column appear to be applied with **bold face underlined italics**, while those on the plus side of the ledger are added, if at all, in pencil.

Whatever happened to the concept of earning Brownie Points?

Now, before the knee-jerk defensiveness kicks in (pun intended), I know not ALL people are this way. But a lot more *are* than *are not*, in my observation.

I have some luke warm theories as to why the good stuff is the skinny kid in the yard who doesn't get picked for volleyball, and the fat kid is the preponderous, unwieldy and ever-present sandwich-eating kid that everyone keeps one wary eye on at all times.

We've grown so self-absorbed, so easy and free with our MINDLESS platitudes, that true genuine complimentary assessments tend to get lumped in with the throwaway lines we pass off as kindness: "How are you? How have you been? It's great to see you. What have you been up to? How's the family?" You know, those "filler" questions we all throw out hoping for that one life-giving, releasing word that ends the conversation before it ever begins: "Fine."

These "pleasantries" have become so bastardized that they are virtually ignored. And I'm not saying they shouldn't be dismissed. Most people simply don't want to *really* know the answer to those questions. They don't care. And so, by extension, I think this mindset gets applied even to the genuine, honest nice things and questions that ARE said and asked. Most people won't make the effort to differentiate between the superficial, and the consequential inquiry or compliment.

Try to give a heartfelt, longer-than-a-sentence answer to any of those questions and watch the fear spread across their face. It'd be comical if it wasn't so tragic.

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Again. Not everybody does this. But many do. Any of you reading this silently saying "Guilty" ?

I know I do it, but I take particular care to *never*, and I mean *never*, do it to people I care about.

Of course, those banal niceties can get anybody through an awkward social situation or gathering with strangers. It's better than being standoffish and rude. But when a clearly insincere platitude or query is offered from someone who matters to me; **THAT** stings. I'd prefer indifference or apathy to phoniness.

I try to be very diligent about throwing out empty compliments, even to strangers. I notice the name on the nametag at the checkout counter and use it when interacting with them. That's what it's there for, right? I've gotten many appreciative looks from people who seem moved I've gone to the "trouble" to read their damn name tag. It saddens me. Personalizing *any* human transaction that I possibly can is a goal of mine every time I venture out. It's a shame most people are only gregarious and genuine with their bartender. Because, trust me, most bartenders want your tip first, second and third, and your life story almost never.

You can even be selfish about it. Personalizing a vapid transaction can make it more palatable, and you will often get better service, or at least a smile. More than worth the effort in my opinion.

But lob out a criticism, constructive or otherwise, and watch the arrow sink deep. No smile forthcoming then, no matter where your heart was when you said it.

It's an imbalance, and I don't know how to solve it, other than tending to my own backyard as diligently as I can.

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