

Making Relational Deposits

“Relational banking” can help you go way beyond “just getting it done.”

by Dan Lentz 09.29.09

Here's something I've become more aware of recently. When someone asks something of me, my willingness and enthusiasm to respond is directly connected to their relational bank account with me. Even if I'm willing to do what they ask, my enthusiasm in doing it is the issue. Here's how it works:

- ❖ Every positive relational interaction makes a deposit in my relational account.
- ❖ Every negative relational interaction creates a withdrawal from my relational account.

The Reality

Now, you might be thinking that this concept sounds really bad—definitely performance-oriented, and maybe even unbiblical. Shouldn't our default mode of operation be unconditional love and grace? And yes, I would agree that unconditional love is the goal. But the reality is that we are all flawed human beings who are incapable of unconditional love—at least for any extended period of time.

The truth is that most people can "get the job done" when we ask something of them, regardless of their enthusiasm about the task—for a little while, that is. But over time, if we don't make consistent relational deposits, these people will lose the will to follow us or do what we ask. When we make relational deposits, people are more willing to be influenced and to take steps of faith. They are more willing to believe that we want them to succeed, and they will be more excited about doing things for the Lord.

The Method

If you want to make relational deposits in someone's life, practice a few of these ideas regularly:

- **Warm greetings.** An encouraging word, a touch, and eye contact are powerful ways to greet others when we see them.
- **Honor others.** Recognizing accomplishments (no matter how small) and consistently making positive comments will overcome and offset the few times when we as leaders need to give negative feedback or a note of correction.
- **Actively serve.** Whether it is giving your time, money, or physical labor to help someone, your example will build up the other person and model a servant's heart to those you serving with.
- **Resolve conflict.** Deal with anger and conflict quickly. Approach the other individual in private at first, admit and clarify misunderstandings, and confess and ask for forgiveness as necessary.
- **Never gossip or slander.** These habits will always impact relationships in a negative way.
- **Love language.** Learn the other person's love language and speak in that language to them frequently. It might be words of affirmation, acts of service, gifts, physical touch, or quality time—discern what makes the other person feel most loved and focus your communication efforts there.
- **Listen well.** Always be more focused on hearing and understanding what others are saying to you than on what you are going to say to them.
- **Speak truth in love.** Always be honest and do your best to avoid presenting a "false face." And when hard or negative things need to be shared, do it with an attitude of love, respect, and kindness.

Practicing these behaviors regularly will ensure that relational deposits are running well ahead of withdrawals for you and the members of your small group.

—Dan Lentz is an Editorial Advisor for SmallGroups.com and the author of [Let's Get Started: How to begin your small-groups ministry](#) (Standard, 2007). Copyright 2009

Ice Breakers

It's often difficult for new small group members to feel comfortable sharing their inner thoughts with one another, which is the key to a good small group experience. One way to ease them into sharing openly with the group is to ask your members a non-threatening question that everyone is comfortable answering. Below are three "ice breakers" that can help you do that. Consider using one of them to "break the ice" at your first meeting.

Who Am I?

Give each person in your group an index card or small piece of paper. Ask them each to write one short (10-15 word) message about who they are. Instruct them not to identify themselves by writing their names on the cards. Next, have them turn in the cards, shuffle them, and pass them out so that each person gets another person's card. Take turns having each person read aloud what their card says and have the group guess who wrote it.

Crazy Names

Leader: Put the following names on index cards or small pieces of paper (one name on each card) and pass the cards as they answer the question.

Which of the following colorful names would best describe your personality? Why?

Gung Ho! Gregory
Slow as a herd of turtles Sam
Nervous Nellie
Sharp as a tack Shane
Sparkplug Sally
Dancin' Dina
Better Late than Never Bill
Devoted Dan
Passionate Patsy
Steady Stan
Hilarious Hanna
Studious Sara

Back to School

If you had to go back to school and get a degree, what area of study would you choose? What school would you choose? Why?