

How Full Is Your Bucket?

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How did you feel after your last interaction with another person?

- Did that person—your spouse, best friend, coworker, or even a stranger—“fill your bucket” by making you feel more positive?
- Or did that person “dip from your bucket,” leaving you more negative than before.

Our lives are shaped by interactions with others. Whether we have a long conversation with a friend or simply place an order at a restaurant, every interaction makes a difference. The results of our encounters are rarely neutral. They are almost always positive or negative. Although we take these interactions for granted, they accumulate and profoundly affect our lives.

Positive give-and-take leads to solid marriages, higher worker satisfaction and productivity, and a happier world.

The Five Strategies

1. Prevent Bucket Dipping

Develop the habit of asking yourself if you are adding to or taking from the other person’s bucket in each interaction. By catching yourself before you make a negative comment, you start making yourself and the people around you feel better.

When you catch yourself in the act of bucket dipping, stop it. Consider your most recent interactions. Have you:

- Poked fun at someone?
- Touched on an insecurity?
- Blatantly pointed out something that person does wrong?

Once you have successfully curtailed your own bucket dipping, encourage similar changes in those around you. Convince others that unwarranted negativity only makes matters worse.

Some persistently negative or hurtful people simply won’t change in spite of your best efforts. If serving as an example won’t help, steer clear of these kinds of people as much as possible for your own well-being and emotional health.

Once you have consciously started to eliminate bucket dipping, keep track of your progress by scoring your interactions. Reflect on your last few exchanges with another person. Decide if, overall, each interaction was more positive or negative. Score each one as either a “+” or “-” in your head, or write them down if you need to.

2. Shine a Light on What Is Right

Each interaction gives us the chance to shine a light on what’s right and fill a bucket.

Instead of telling someone how much he/she disappoints you, begin to draw attention to the things he/she does well and what you like about him/her. Eventually the other person may begin to fill your bucket, just as your positive outlook has filled his/hers.

The most unexpected thing is that you will feel happier on your own by focusing on the positive rather than dwelling on the negative, which will cause you to be much more positive in your interactions with other people.

Positive emotions create “chains of interpersonal events,” the far-reaching results of which you may or may not get to see in person. But they are there and happening.

Every time you fill a bucket, you’re setting something in motion.

When someone fills your bucket, accept it. Never just brush it off and diminish what that person is doing. Fill his/her bucket in return by saying “thank you,” letting the person know that you appreciate the compliment or recognition. In turn, you are more likely to share your renewed positive energy with others.

Positive Impact Test Questions

- _____ I have helped someone in the last 24 hours.
- _____ I am an exceptionally courteous person.
- _____ I like being around positive people.
- _____ I have praised someone in the last 24 hours.
- _____ I have developed a knack for making other people feel good.
- _____ I am more productive when I am around positive people.
- _____ In the last 24 hours, I have told someone that I cared about him/her.
- _____ I make it a point to become acquainted with people wherever I go.
- _____ When I receive recognition, it makes me want to give recognition to someone else.
- _____ In the last week, I have listened to someone talk through his/her goals and ambitions.
- _____ I make unhappy people laugh.
- _____ I make it a point to call each of my associates by the name he/she likes to be called.
- _____ I notice what my colleagues do at a level of excellence.
- _____ I always smile at the people I meet.
- _____ I feel good about giving praise whenever I see good behavior.

3. Make Best Friends

Employees often stay with organizations that are less than ideal, or even unhealthy, because they have a best friend there.

Having “friends,” “good friends,” or “close friends” on the job is not as important as having “a best friend at work.” People with best friends at work have better safety records, receive higher customer satisfaction scores, and increase workplace productivity.

Since great relationships lead to a significant increase in life satisfaction and lonely people suffer psychologically, have several relationships of the best-friend caliber among your workplace, home, and social circles.

Consider some of your best relationships. They were probably formed through an early series of positive interaction. You’re not likely to become good friends with someone if the majority of your initial interactions are negative. Remember this during your first interactions with a new acquaintance.

Start by learning the names of people you see regularly. For each one, make sure you learn the name he/she prefers to be called.

Whether you want to build many relationships or just a few deep ones, your best approach is to fill a person’s bucket in your very first interaction. Bucket filling is a powerful way to initiate new relationships and to strengthen your existing relationships. In fact, your friendships are unlikely to survive, let alone thrive, without regular bucket filling.

Begin with the most important people in your life. Tell them how important they are to you and why. Don’t assume they already know. Even if they do, they’d probably love to hear it anyway. Continue to learn more about what builds them up. Be a catalyst for an even more trusting, lasting, and positive relationship.

Listen to your friends with unconditional, positive regard. Support them in their endeavors. Encourage them. Be a mentor, or at least be the person they know they can always go to for a kind word. At work, become the person known for noticing when others do a great job. Learn something new about each person you work or interact with. Create positive interactions with acquaintances and even strangers.

You might start to notice that more and more people want to be around you.

4. Give Unexpectedly

The vast majority of people prefer gifts that are unexpected. Expected gifts fill our buckets, but for some reason, receiving things unexpectedly fills our buckets just a little more. It’s about the element of surprise. And the gift doesn’t have to be anything big to be successful.

An unexpected gift doesn't have to be tangible. It can be a gift of trust or responsibility. Sharing something personal or entrusting a friend with a secret can fill his/her bucket.

In your own interactions, look for opportunities to give small gifts to others out of the blue, maybe a funny little trinket, a hug, or an offer to grab a cup of coffee. Even a smile can be an unexpected and cherished gift. Consider unexpected sharing as well. What books, articles, or stories could you send someone that would positively influence his/her day?

5. Reverse the Golden Rule

In the case of bucket filling, "Do unto others as they would have you do unto them."

Some of us prefer tangible rewards or gifts, while others are driven by words and acknowledgment. While certain people want to receive kind words in front of a crowd, others prefer a quieter, one-to-one commendation or compliment from someone they love, admire, or respect.

The Bucket Filling Interview

- By what name do you like to be called?
- What are your "hot buttons," hobbies or interests you like to talk about a lot?
- What increases your positive emotions or "fills your bucket" the most?
- From **whom** do you most like to receive recognition or praise?
- What type of recognition or praise do you like best? Do you like public, private, written, verbal, or other kinds of recognition?
- What form of recognition motivates you the most? Do you like gift certificates, a title for winning a competition, a meaningful note or e-mail, or something else?
- What is the greatest recognition you have ever received?

In addition to being individualized, praise will mean more to the recipient if it is specific. Putting praise into writing or e-mail is a great way to do this. Written recognition is also especially rewarding because it serves as a lasting acknowledgment, something the recipient can reflect on over and over again.

Set a goal to write at least five notes or other forms of recognition every month. Keep some notes where you'll see them to help you remember to take the time to compose them. If you don't like writing by hand, type them or send an e-mail.

Once you have written a note, you can quietly slip the note to the recipient in person, send it, e-mail it, or read it out loud with fanfare. Do whatever fills his/ her bucket most. This is the essence of great bucket filling!