

## Session 11.1 - Working in the Gift

Living in the Gift

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OK, in this segment I would now like to tell you everything I know about my “business model” of gift, and I would like to share my experiences, successes and failures, as I’ve tried to do things a different way.

This very course is an example of the gift model of business, because I offer it as a gift and allow the participant to decide what, if any, return gift is appropriate.

To do things this way requires a little bit of education, since most people do not have a category for it in their conceptual universe. If I am not careful they will default into seeing it as a “free online course”. This exemplifies the first pitfall of doing business by gift. It gets put into the category of free.

This is a problem even if you are independently wealthy and don’t need to receive money for your work. For one thing, people may assume that the reason it is free is that it must not be very good. They may come into it with low expectations and a low level of commitment. I had a friend who is a nutritionist and she discovered that when she was offering free consults, people would rarely implement her suggestions, but when they had to pay a fee, they were much more compliant. Paying a fee, or in this case a course tuition, is a kind of entry ritual into the realm of healing or into the realm learning. By paying, you signal to the subconscious mind: “This is for real.” Making a payment is a ritual of commitment.

If you offer something for free, then you risk attracting clients or participants who do not value what you offer, who have little commitment, who come late and leave early, or who dilute the field of attention for those who do take it seriously. That is why, for many things, there needs to be some alternative entry ritual. ***If you’re not going to charge money there has to be something to serve this function of signalling to the unconscious mind that this is real, that this is important and that this is valuable.*** For this course, you saw that you had to answer some provocative questions. That was a bit of a little entry ritual I made in case you decided that you didn’t want to pay for it. I offered those questions not only because I did want you to think about them and to orient to the subject, but also because they signal to your unconscious, “I am entering into something, I am entering a realm.” You may have noticed, I made it clear through my language that this is not a FREE course, free and by gift are two different things. In fact I do see this course as valuable and I blush to say that I find it more useful and richer in content than some \$300 course or even \$1000 online programs out there. And it took

time and energy by me and those who work with me to put it on. So thinking in those terms it would be inappropriate to make it free. It disrespects the people who created it, including myself and it also disrespects the course. As I also mentioned before it is also inappropriate to charge for it. I don't want there to be any financial barriers to entry. In the world that we live in where money is so unfairly maldistributed. And I don't want to take anyone's grocery money and keep anyone out who could benefit from the material here. So that is one of the reasons I offer the course by gift. And I would like also to note an important subtlety – even though it is not free, those who give zero in tuition are completely welcome. It is not up to me to judge the return gift. How can I know your situation? How do I know that zero is not the appropriate amount for you to pay. I don't know that.

I have learned that if I carry any trace of expectation or judgment around the return gift, by which I mean the voluntary payment, then my invitation to give will be tainted with psychological pressure. And if I am subtly coercing you to pay something, if I am manipulating your guilt or making you feel obligated, then I am no longer fully in gift. I am in fact taking from you, extracting from you. Sensitive people will notice the hypocrisy, and the flow of gifts will dry up. It is quite a paradox, that the more I try to ensure an inflow, the less of an inflow there is.

The path of gift is a path of trust. I trust in you the same yearning that I know in myself. When I am moved, when I'm inspired when I am enriched by something, I feel grateful for it and I WANT to give back. It depends on the situation, sometimes I may want to give forward. I may not be inspired to give a return gift to the person who gave it to me. Maybe our status in life doesn't make a return gift appropriate and it is obvious that I am meant to pass this onward to somebody else, so that can happen too. The return gift, the appropriate gift may not be toward the giver.

Another reason I like to operate by gift is that I want to send a message of trust into the world. I am familiar with the jaded cynicism and the feeling of betrayal when you recognize, "In the end, this guy is all about the money too." Sometimes on the Internet I come across these amazing transformational programs and teachings, and then after a teaser or two comes the pitch, the \$500 course, and I wonder, you know "What is this person serving? Is it really the teaching that comes first or is it the dollar?" In the end, when push comes to shove which takes priority?

Now don't get me wrong – I am happy to receive money for my work. I am grateful to the generous people whose support allows me to continue doing it. Supports me, my family, my life, my work, all the people who work with me to bring this forth but ultimately I am not doing it for the money. If I set a price and put the information behind a paywall, that would be I am putting the money before the message. If I make it available by gift and invite a voluntary payment, I am putting the message before the money. And I hope people can feel my sincerity in this, I hope they can feel my genuine nonjudgement if they choose zero. This is really important to me. I want

to provide a respite from the world of someone always trying to make money off of us. I want to offer a data point that contributes to a different story, a story that people are generous and it is OK to live that way, to live in generosity. If you doubt my sincerity, and honestly if you doubt it, then don't give and then you will see that what you receive from my end is identical and you can see how you feel inside too. There's an inner guidance system and you might feel totally fine about that too and if you feel totally fine about that trust that feeling. This is saying more about this than I usually would say. Usually I do not offer that much guidance but I am saying a lot more in this case because I want to give you a window into the way that I internally think about this. As a way to kind of transmit to you the state of mind and the state of being that my relative success in business by gift comes from. I am saying yeah, trust your inner guidance about giving and not giving and maybe, if it doesn't feel good then what is, what is that feeling coming from? Just to explore that can be really illuminating.

I am always careful to use precise language when I present gift events or courses. There are some obvious pitfalls, well maybe they weren't so obvious to begin with. For example, I advise you never to say, "Pay what you can." it invites a kind of scarcity mentality. It invites feelings of having to justify the amount you paid. "Well I have such-and-such an income and could pay X but I've got kids in school etc etc so I should only have to pay Y..." So that's one problem. Secondly, Pay what you can isn't actually a serious suggestion. For example Warren Buffett takes this course, what he can pay, he COULD pay five billion dollars but I am not seriously suggesting that. I would hate to have five billion dollars, because then I would have to spend all my time finding good ways to use it and I wouldn't be a writer anymore. So please Warren if you are on this course don't give me five billion dollars.

Anyway, joking aside let me distill what I've learned about business in the gift down to a few basic principles. They might not apply to everyone in all situations, but I think you will recognize the spirit beneath them.

***1. Make the invitation to give conspicuous enough that people do not consign your offering to the category of "free."***

***2. Make sure to welcome those who choose not to give, and make sure the welcome is sincere.***

***3. Be precise in your language. Say things like, "give what feels right" or "give what reflects your feeling of value and gratitude," rather than "pay what you can."***

***4. Create some kind of entry ritual to establish commitment. It could be a deposit, a refundable deposit or it could be something non-monetary.***

**5. In most cases it is necessary to offer some kind of guidance about what might be an appropriate gift.**

In our society people are accustomed to the rigid form of guidance known as **the price**. In other cultures the price is not so rigid. In Taiwan for example, when I was there, bargaining is a matter of course in all situations, it wasn't actually as rigid as it is here. Anyway people are more used to the price so if you do away with that, how will they orient to the appropriate gift? In real gift cultures, that orientation is a product of social customs and implicit rules that offer that guidance. In a Taiwanese wedding for example, you know that if you are such-and-such a relation, with such-and-such a social status, then it is expected that you will give a certain amount for your wedding gift of, say, around a thousand dollars. If you give \$600 you would be considered a little stingy; if you gave \$2000 you would be considered generous. You have a general ballpark figure of social acceptability and appropriateness. If you deviated outside that range then that would be inappropriate. This is maybe more the case in a traditional or indigenous society – if you go to the shaman or medicine woman for help, you pretty much know what kind of gift is appropriate to bring. We don't have that kind of implicit cultural understanding so you have to offer some kind of guidance. For example you might make known your own costs, or you might make known the general market value of what you offer or if you have hard costs you might require those to be covered and anything on top of that is a gift. I often work like that. When I hold retreats I'll ask people to cover room and board, with the tuition self-determined on top of the room and board or if you are doing plumbing or carpentry by gift, then you might also have a base minimum to cover hard costs. Except sometimes you'll give those away too. For example at my retreats we give out some scholarships. Or sometimes I do give explicitly free events. This is not a new arena to be a purist. I don't decide based on purity or principles. I decide as best I can based on what feels good, joyous, easeful, and abundant. That's my ideal anyway. Sometimes I also decide based on what will garner approval, what I think will work financially, what is consistent with my self-image, and I have other ego motivations. These become visible over time, and with that visibility comes the opportunity to transform them.

Let me ask a very naïve question: **Why do I want to transform them?** It is not part of a quest to be a good person. It is because they bring poor results, both for myself and what I serve. As I grow into greater alignment with the future I serve, then anything misaligned feels less and less comfortable.

We can say then, that becoming a better person is a natural, organic process that happens TO us. In other words, it comes as a gift. What we need to do is to prepare to receive the gift.

For the seed sentence this time, we'll work with the perception that is foundational to making this work, which is to know that when people receive something valuable,

they WANT to give in turn. This is directly contrary to the economic teaching that people seek to maximize self-interest. If you believe that, then living in the gift is just plain stupid. So practice seeing a different human nature with the mantra. “They WANT to give. He wants to give. She wants to give. We want to give.” And just say that to yourself as you encounter people. He wants to give. She wants to give. As you practice that, feel its truth and see it them become true.

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