

A Sentiment for All Seasons: We Offer Help More Often Than Ask for It

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(PhysOrg.com) -- People do act as if it is better to give than receive, but perhaps not for purely altruistic reasons, Yale researchers report.

People are much more likely to offer help such as providing a ride to the train station to a casual friend than to ask for similar assistance, the researchers report in the January edition of the *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*.

The difference diminished, but did not disappear, when the friendship was closer, the study found.

Our tendency to offer more support than we seek probably has less to do with innate generosity than a desire to forge stronger bonds with someone, says Margaret Clark, professor of psychology and co-author of the study along with Ph.D. student Lindsey A. Beck.

“I think the question of whether somebody is being selfish or not is really not the right question,” Clark says. “I take no position on that. But people put a value on the relationship.”

In one study, Clark and Beck quizzed 85 subjects about whether they would pick up mail, return a DVD or provide a ride to the train station. The subjects were also queried whether they would ask a casual or close friend for these favors.

A second study explored whether people would volunteer to do a boring

task if it would spare a casual or close friend from doing the same chore and whether they would ask a casual or close friend to do the same for them.

In both studies, subjects were more willing to offer assistance than ask for it. But in the first study, the closer the friendship, the more likely it was that the subject would ask for help. This suggests offering assistance may be a way to convey to others that they would make a good partner in a relationship.

“Offering support conveys one is compassionate and capable and a desirable relationship partner; seeking support may suggest that one is too entitled and needy to make a good relationship partner,” the researchers theorized.

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