

Unmotivated people benefit more from giving advice than receiving it

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Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

People struggling with motivation will benefit more from giving advice than receiving it, although most people predict the opposite to be true, according to new research from the University of Chicago Booth School of Business.

In a forthcoming paper in *Psychological Science*, Prof. Ayelet Fishbach and the University of Pennsylvania's Lauren Eskries-Winkler and Angela Duckworth find that people struggling to achieve goals incorrectly assumed that they needed expert advice to succeed, when in fact they were better helped by doling out advice.

Giving advice motivated givers by raising their confidence, a reality that people struggling to reach their goals failed to anticipate.

The findings were consistent across a series of experiments including improving study habits, saving money, controlling tempers, losing weight and looking for jobs.

"In the process of giving advice, advisors may form specific intentions and lay out concrete plans of action—both of which increase [motivation](#) and achievement," the authors wrote.

The reason that giving advice may boost motivation starts from a bump in confidence that comes with simply being asked to deliver the advice, according to the researchers. In order to give advice, you need to sort through your thoughts and make a recommendation. That requires givers to search their own brains for examples of behavior that has worked successfully for them in the past, an exercise likely to boost confidence as well.

In one experiment with public school middle-schoolers (sixth-, seventh- and eighth-graders), researchers asked one group of students to give advice to younger students about staying motivated in school. They asked another group of students to get advice about staying motivated in school from a teacher. The advice sessions occurred once a week over three weeks.

Before, during and after the intervention, the middle-schoolers could

sign into a vocabulary program online. An invisible timer tracked minutes spent with the program.

Researchers found that the group giving advice studied vocabulary 38 percent more in the four weeks after the intervention than did the middle-schoolers who received advice about schoolwork from a teacher.

The very act of giving the advice makes the giver feel powerful and confident, an effect the predictors of behavior didn't account for, Fishbach and colleagues wrote. Giving advice also restores some of the confidence lost when people have routinely fallen short of goals. Confident people set higher goals for themselves and remain more committed to them over time, the researchers said.

Conversely, "when people lack motivation, receiving advice may actually be harmful. Receiving help can feel stigmatizing because it undermines feelings of competence," the authors stated.

The findings have implications for programs that promote weight loss, academic achievement or better job performance, because those programs typically rely on participants receiving rather than giving [advice](#).

"We hope our findings, which illuminate the motivational power of giving, do just that: goad scientists and practitioners to consider the ways in which struggling individuals benefit from giving," the authors wrote. "Indeed, our research provides empirical support for an age-old aphorism: it is in giving that we receive."

More information: Dear Abby: Should I Give Advice or Receive it? faculty.chicagobooth.edu/ayele...fishbach/research/In%20Giving%20We%20Receive.pdf

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