

Paying the favour forward -- one good deed at a time

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Pay It Forward, you may recall, was the title of a movie featuring a kid named Trevor, played by Haley Joel Osment, who had a brilliant idea when his teacher challenged his class to "think of something to change the world and put it into action."

Trevor came up with the notion of paying a favour forward, not back -- repaying good deeds with new good deeds forwarded to three new people. It was Disneyesque in form and content, but if you haven't seen the movie, it's definitely worth renting.

More to the point, I've come to realize that networking brings the Pay It Forward philosophy sharply into focus.

Not long after I lost my job, our friend and neighbour, Paul McCabe, heard about my plight through a mutual friend and immediately called to ask what he could do to help.

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He suggested meeting for coffee and when we did, our conversation was all about me. He wanted nothing more than to help me get back on my feet.

This wasn't the first time he had helped out. He did exactly the same thing during my last job loss, when he also gave me a copy of his inspirational book *Feed the Good Dog* (<http://www.feedthegooddog.com>). The book focuses on making the personal choice to succeed, which was very topical for a guy in transition. It even has a complete chapter on the subject of Paying It Forward.

Paul is a guy who takes a Pay It Forward approach to life, giving more to others than he gets himself. I was certainly grateful for his spontaneous offers of help when I needed them.

More recently, I had another Pay it Forward moment during a networking meeting with Tim Cork, president of NexCareers, a career-transition company. Tim is a consummate networker, and is absolutely committed to the concept of giving.

In his new book, *Tapping the Iceberg*, Tim refers to good networkers as members of the "G7 Club" -- people who give, give, give, give, give and give again.

He was demonstrating an excellent database tool his firm has developed for job seekers. It contains contacts at more than 9,000 companies and nearly 3,000 search firms in Canada.



I was waxing lyrical about the tool and how useful it would be for my job search. Without missing a beat, Tim offered a free subscription. He saw that I was really taken with the concept, and would clearly get a lot out of it, so he gave willingly, expecting nothing in return.

Paying It Forward seems to be part of the makeup of people like Paul and Tim. It's not surprising, I guess, as they've each made a career out of helping people achieve greater success.

People who have faced job transition themselves also turn out to be consistent givers.

I first met M&A lawyer Jordan Dolgin at a board meeting of the York Technology Association, a networking group for the tech industry. The law firm he works for, Wilson Vukelich LLP, is a YTA sponsor.

I subsequently called Jordan to ask for a networking meeting, and he immediately agreed. We met at a local hotel restaurant and had hardly started chatting before Jordan moved into the giving zone.

Without much need for preamble, he got right down to helping me make connections, thinking up useful contacts I could talk to, providing me with referrals and coming up with suggestions of where I could focus next.

I could see this was going to be one of those meetings that yielded way more than the average of four referrals I like to secure. He even offered his name as a character reference for interviews, if needed.

So was I surprised when he revealed during our conversation that he himself had dealt with job loss? Absolutely not. I have consistently found that people who have experienced career transition almost always act like Jordan. In his hour of need, he had been on the receiving end and he was only too happy to take a Pay It Forward attitude as a way of thanking people who had offered him a helping hand in the past.

Once you've become a member of the club of involuntary job losers, you come to understand how to help out other members. As a non-member two years ago, I confess I rather begrudgingly gave up time when people called asking to network. I didn't really know why they were doing it, and couldn't see why people were calling me unless they had something to sell.

Since my own experiences with job loss, however, I have made a sacred vow that I will *always* make time for people in need of networking help, and I have. I now have the insider's knowledge that non-members simply don't have access to, and I'm more than willing to share it.

Soon after I met with Jordan, I received a call from a complete stranger who is also in job-search mode. She'd been reading my articles and tracked me down to ask for my help and advice.

Of course, I said yes. We met a few days later and I was really happy to have the opportunity to share my own learning and experiences, and, hopefully, provide some helpful pointers.

While a job search isn't something I would want to wish on the gainfully employed, it has provided one hugely valuable lesson for me: So many people are incredibly giving. Their generosity makes me believe that the Pay It Forward revolution that occurs in the movie isn't so far-fetched after all.

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