

Change Your Life BY JEFF HADEN

How? When you give, you also receive.

Phone calls are great. But when you want to say something important, writing a note, especially a handwritten note, can be even more powerful. Why? Notes are unexpected. (Who writes letters anymore?) Notes can be savored. Notes can be saved. Notes can be pulled out and reread dozens of times. The memories of phone calls can be fleeting. Notes--meaningful, sincere, genuine expressions of thanks, of praise, of feelings--can last forever.

Here are five notes you should write today:

1. Write a thank-you to someone who believed in you. Belief is a powerful thing. Some people have incredible stores of self-belief, but most of us are given confidence and self-assurance by others. Slowly but surely, through their encouragement and support, we develop a stronger sense of self. At some point, someone saw you struggling and gave you hope. At some point, someone saw something in you that you didn't yet see in yourself. Who you are today is a direct result of that person's faith in you. Belief, founded or unfounded, is incredibly powerful--and when someone else believes in us, it's unforgettable. Tell someone what a huge difference he or she made in your life. Reading your note will make a huge difference in that person's life--and in your relationship.

2. Write an apology to a person you let down. We've all made mistakes. We've all done things we regret. Or we haven't done things--and we regret not acting. We've all failed to step up, or step in, or show support, or lend an ear or shoulder... Maybe you feel you've moved past it. Maybe you feel the other person has moved past it, too. Maybe you're dreaming.

An apology not made is the elephant in a room. No matter how much time has passed, it still colors every subsequent interaction. Kill the elephant. Say you're sorry.

Just don't follow your apology with a disclaimer. Don't say, "I'm sorry, but I was really mad because you..." or "I'm sorry I blew up at you, but I do think you were out of line, too."

Don't say anything that in any way places even the smallest amount of blame on the other person. Say you're sorry, say why you're sorry, and take all the blame. No less. No more. The elephant may never totally disappear, but once you apologize, sincerely and genuinely, the elephant will no longer matter--to either of you.

3. Write a note of congratulations. You don't even have to know the person. If you liked a book, contact the author and say, "I loved your book." If a local entrepreneur landed a major

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customer, send a note and say, "I realize you don't know me, but I was so impressed I just had to congratulate you!"

Just make sure you don't follow your congratulations with some sort of request. (Unfortunately, that's the oldest trick in the networking book.)

Bonus points if you explain the impact the person's accomplishment had on you. Maybe it motivated you. Maybe it inspired you. Maybe it changed your life in some small way. If so, say so. Then you're not only congratulating people for a job well done--you're letting them know they made an impact in someone else's life.

You're letting them know they *matter*. They'll feel a little better about themselves--and you'll feel better about yourself, too.

4. Write an offer to help. Many people hesitate to ask for help. They see admitting they need help as the same as admitting a weakness. In a hard-charging, Type-A world, who willingly shows vulnerability?

But everyone--*everyone*--needs help. So offer to help. But don't just say, "Is there anything I can help you with?" That won't work: We're trained to say, "No, I'm fine."

Be specific. Find something you can help with. Say, "I know you're working on *that*. Can I help you finish?" Or say, "I've always wanted to know more about *this*. Can I help you work on it?"

Offer in a way that feels collaborative, not patronizing or gratuitous. If you want, make it a "redeemable coupon" that entitles the recipient to take you up on a specific offer. Offer in the right spirit and people--especially people who might be struggling--will jump at a chance to draw on your energy, enthusiasm, and talent.

And in the process, you'll strengthen a bond and make a better friend.

5. Write an unexpected compliment. Every day, people around you do good things. Most of those people don't work with or for you; in fact, most of them have no relationship with you, professional or personal. Compliment one of them for something for which it's least expected. Write a note to a doctor who helped you through a rough time. Write a note to a college professor who made you see the world in a different way. Write a note to your town praising the snowplow crews. Write a note to someone who did something thoughtful not because it was expected but simply because they could.

Expected feels good. Unexpected makes a huge, and lasting, impact.

And the note you write may be displayed for a long time, serving as a reminder that every job, no matter how seemingly thankless or invisible, is appreciated by at least one person.